Campione! Volume 3

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These are novel illustrations that were included in "Campione! Volume 3".

カンピオーネ！ Campione III

はじまりの物語

丈月城 Illustration シコルスキー

D た 9-3

カンピオーネ！ Ⅲ はじまりの物語

丈月城

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草薙護堂は未だ神殺しにあらず。

草薙護堂（くさなぎごどう）は祖父の友人を訪ねるため、イタリア・サルデーニャに来ていた。その地で不思議な少年と出会い、友誼をはぐくむ護堂。だが、そこに現れた魔術師を名乗る少女・エリカとの出会いによって「神」にまつわる事件に巻き込まれることに…。草薙護堂は如何（いか）にして神を殺し、魔王（カンピオーネ）となったのか。そのはじまりの物語が遂に明かされる!!

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Authors Introduction
著者紹介

丈月 城（たけづき じょう）

私、かつて仕事場の同僚に
極めて効果的な仕事の処理方法についての
私案を語った際に
「よくそんな邪悪なことを思いつきますね」と
賛辞された経験もあったりするのですが、
初対面の方にはおおむね「やさしそうな人だ」と言われます。
どちらが本当の私なのかは秘密です。

シコルスキー

S57生まれ、横浜市在住のイラストレーター。
趣味は読書とPCゲーム…等。
最近〝left 4 DEAD〟で
ゾンビ娘萌えに目覚めました。

スーパーダッシュ文庫 丈月　城の本

カンピオーネ！　神はまつろわず
カンピオーネ！　Ⅱ 魔王来臨
カンピオーネ！　Ⅲ はじまりの物語

Characters Introduction
主要登場人物

草薙護堂（くさなぎ ごどう）

高校1年生。
軍神ウルスラグナの権能を有するカンピオーネ。

エリカ・ブランデッリ

《赤銅黒十字》の魔術師。
自称、護堂の「愛人」。

万里谷祐理（まりやゆり）

霊視の力を持つ媛巫女。
護堂の「正妻」と称される。

ルクレチア・ゾラ

サルデーニャの魔女。一朗の友人。

草薙静花（くさなぎしずか）

護堂の妹。祐理の茶道部の後輩。

草薙一朗（くさなぎいちろう）

護堂の祖父。若い頃は浮名を流したらしい。

アリアンナ・ハヤマ・アリアルディ

通称アンナ。エリカの部下。

甘粕冬馬（あまかすとうま）

正史編纂委員会のエージェント。

装丁／川谷康久（川谷デザイン）

カンピオーネ!
Ⅲ はじまりの物語
丈月　城

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カンピオーネ!
Ⅲ はじまりの物語
丈月　城
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丈月城

Illustration

シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

Campione III

はじまりの物語

護堂

ルクレチア

少年

エリカ

祐理

「……あなたって、
やっぱりバカなの？」

「これが
俺たちの
人間の
切り札なんだ」

「さあ、それを
我に渡すがよい」

我

「だって、
お給仕の際に
必要じゃないですか」

「そろそろ護堂を返してちょうだい」

「……こら、手を休めるな。
もっとしっかり塗れ」

「……護堂さん」

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丈月城

Illustration

シコルスキー

カドホル

はじまりの物語

Campione III

■どうもー。
毎度挿絵を担当させていただいております、シコルスキーです。
初めての方ははじめまして、そうじゃない方はこんにちは！
読者の皆様のお蔭をもちまして、このあとがき
（という名目で、単なる自重しない楽描きページに堕してるコーナー）
もどうやら三回目を迎えることができました。

■今回も寝不足の異常な精神状態でラフを切っていたら
やっぱりひどい有様に。
だからこれは僕が悪いんじゃないんです。
…そう、全部睡眠不足が悪いんＤＡ！

…ホントデスヨ？

■しこるすきー
HP：ググググ
http://www.sikorsky.sakura.ne.jp/

Prologue

Summer vacations.

The extended break that countless high schoolers longed for.

For this month and a half, some went out to play and have fun, others engaged in sports, still others toiled with sweat and devoted their passions to work, love, supplementary lessons, or doujinshi conventions.

But now, to Kusanagi Godou, his summer vacation was synonymous with disaster.

"—Hoho. Did you hear that, Godou? You'll be traveling together with me for the summer vacation. This is a foregone decision and your highest priority, so you'd better accept it... I won't take no for an answer."

The blond-haired girl dressed in red had already declared this half a month ago.

The smile floating on her face was so magnificent, and yet so evil.

To his knowledge, Godou did not know another girl apart from Erica Blandelli who could smile this way. Possessing outstanding beauty and intelligence, crafty ingenuity, and genius talent in swords and magic, plus total confidence in these areas — a noble smile that concentrated all these qualities together.

Godou was a healthy sixteen-year-old high school student.

To be asked to travel together with such a beautiful girl as Erica, he was very happy, no doubt about it.

Very happy, but there was a catch.

He definitely could not agree with her wishes as promptly as this. If he did, it would end up being a progression of travel—wedding—pregnancy—child-rearing, and by the latter half of his twenties, the majority of his life would be semi-automatically decided just like that—something as scary as that could happen.

"Young man, what you are trying to say is that, the reason you are not willing to accept Erica's proposal is because... like a lover you have known for six years, to have someone who shares the same personality and preferences as your girlfriend, to share a warm and fuzzy relationship, it makes you feel assured and comfortable, yet lacks a certain excitement."

Godou naturally recalled the words of the older friend who lived in that oh so nostalgic Sardinia.

"Then one fine day that girlfriend says 'hey, we have been together for quite a while now. How about we go and visit your parents next time.' At that time, that boy thought 'Even if you say that, I still want to remain a free man, even if it is for a while longer,' and such. Thus he uses an 'ok, maybe next time' excuse as an answer. Just like how you are now."

"I have not even known Erica for six months, your analogy is completely off!"

"Ah ha ha, doesn't that make the analogy even better? A milestone that usually happens after at least five years into a relationship has already occurred in the short time that you two have known each other. It's natural for you to get cold feet."

Even though Godou did not agree with such a tactless description, deep in his heart he concurred completely.

Thinking carefully, he did not have any reason to reject Erica.

Even without mentioning her beauty and ability, there existed a wonderful sense of unspoken understanding between the two of them.

Other than a massive difference in values, there was no other critical flaw. Most importantly there were her displays of affection—passionately, verbally, through her attitudes and behaviors.

(...Even if it was just a verbal marriage proposal, from that moment onwards, my life would have been deemed a [called game][1]! Even a playoff would be impossible.)

However, there was one point on which Godou was certain.

Erica Blandelli's decisiveness, planning ability and initiative were second to none.

If she put her mind to it, even the impossible could become possible in most cases. On the same note, she could even make Godou think that a marriage might not be so bad after all, that was the kind of attraction she held.

Thus, Godou felt that he must never ever lower his guard and resist with all his might when he is around her.

So for this summer, he believed that he should be fine if he stayed out of her clutches.

With all that in mind, Godou's final conclusion was to flee.

He could never win in physical strength, much less in terms of wit and resourcefulness. The best self-defense strategy was to not go directly against Erica, so what about the escape routes and potential hiding places?

In order to make sure there were enough funds to escape, he had no choice but to get himself hired by familiar acquaintances for jobs every day.

At the same time, escape plans must be made.

But where to escape to? It would be best if it was a place where she couldn't do as she pleased.

Did such a place even exist on earth...

As summer vacation drew near, Godou became more and more lost in this thought.

"Then, Godou-san... The thing you said before, what happened next?"

With only one week left till vacation, Godou was questioned about this.

It was after class at the upperclassmen block of Jounan Academy.

In an empty classroom corner, the one he was facing was Mariya Yuri, the school idol renowned for her beauty, charm and delicacy.

...Thinking back carefully, it was difficult to believe he once did such a daring thing to this lady.

Godou tried desperately to act normal. If he became too aware of the past, he would be too embarrassed to look her in the face.

"Haha, the thing about running away from Erica? Aye, even though I have made all sorts of preparations, there is still no place for me to escape to. To be honest, it's really troubling."

"Is that so..."

Yuri nodded and muttered beside him.

Somehow, it felt like she was deliberately avoiding looking Godou straight in the face.

As expected, that incident has become a burden for her.

The Hime-Miko of Musashino — the sacred miko responsible for protecting the Kanto region with their spirit powers.

Amongst them, Yuri possessed outstanding powers of spirit vision. But due to circumstance, to think that she did *that* with Godou... How he wished he could find a hole to hide in.

“About, about that Mariya-san, how should I say this, that—”

“G-Godou-san, that thing, erm, about that thing—”

Speaking together coincidentally at the same time just made the situation more awkward to both parties.

"...If you have something to say, don’t mind me and please go ahead."

"No, no, there is no such thing. You should speak first, Godou-san."

While they continued to allow each other to talk first, their faces inevitably met.

At that moment, Godou realized that his face was as red as an apple. Yuri was no different, turning red due to embarrassment.

...Erica Blandelli, he had never met anyone who understands him more than her.

Having played baseball for so long, Godou had partnered as a catcher with many people before.

But nobody had ever been 'as one' with him as her, one of the opposite sex.

Having only known each other for just four months, they understood each other on a heart to heart level, whereby with just a single glance, they were able to communicate what the other was thinking perfectly.

But now, the girl in front of him, Mariya Yuri, was equally in tune.

The way this girl spoke, thought and acted under numerous circumstances, matched him to an uncanny degree.

Even for someone who admitted he was not skilled in handling girls, Godou clearly noticed recently.

Being with Yuri was never unpleasant.

Godou could spend a day with her without saying anything, and he still would not feel uncomfortable around her.

Even without explanation, Godou could understand. Her harsh and severe words were an expression of her concern. Mariya Yuri was the kindest and most gentle person that Kusanagi Godou knew. Thus he believed that he would receive retribution if he did not express his gratitude to her.

"Umm... Sorry Mariya. I've... always caused you so much trouble."

"W-What are you saying? Not once have I felt that you have caused me trouble, so you should stop blaming yourself. Pull yourself together."

Said a red-faced Yuri, making Godou unable to do anything but laugh awkwardly.

She had most likely said this to help him get his act together, guess like he had no choice but to accept it.

“Haha, I got it. I will work hard... what was it that Mariya wanted to say just now again?”

“Ah, right... About that, Godou-san, about your earlier problem of finding a place to hide... If you do not mind, how about leaving it to me?”

Being suddenly told about this, Godou was shocked and could only stare at the embarrassed Yuri.

The Hime-Miko—a true 'hime'[2], having a pitiable yet elegant stature, abruptly brought up such a thing.

“Actually, it was Amakasu-san from the History Compilation Committee who will be preparing it for you. He seemed to sincerely wish to help Godou-san...”

The History Compilation Committee.

The organization whose goal was to hide from the general public all sorts of bizarre incidents—magic, spells, supernatural phenomena, gods, and other supernatural existences.

When he heard the name of the History Compilation Committee member, Godou couldn't help but think.

Can I trust such an organization which I haven't even got the slightest clue of? Can I count on them?

"Of course, when we reach there I would act as your tour guide. So even if you are on a foreign land, you will not feel any inconveniences. I will take good care of you—you better not take this wrongly, this is a request from the committee, it cannot be helped..."

"Oh, even though it is great, but this time, I think I will pass."

"This is definitely not because I want to go on a trip with you that I requested for this—eh? This time? Pass...?"

Seeing Yuri in shock, Godou replied.

"Ah, even though you have done so much for me, but sorry, I have to say no this time."

"H-How can this be! But Godou-san, didn't you seem like you were in so much trouble just now!?"

Though Godou was grateful for her honest offer, he still had to reject her.

"No, though I asked for your help, I don't think I can accept the assistance of civil servants for a matter like this. That is what I think, I am very sorry."

If it had been Yuri's personal offer, he would have gratefully accepted. But if the name of such an unknown and suspicious organization was involved, it would be best to think twice before agreeing.

Campione. The name of a devil king who had usurped a god's authorities. A warrior both human and superhuman.

Regrettably, Godou now belonged amongst the ranks of these existences beyond common reasoning. If he sought help from others, he must think carefully and be wary of them. No matter how much Kusanagi Godou hated it, he was now the [King] who possessed great influence over the world of magic and wizardry.

For example, Erica was a mage from the magic association Copper Black Cross.

Godou would obediently accept her assistance — as well as the association behind her. This was mostly because the leader of the organization, Erica's uncle, was a well-known man.

The noble knight of knights. The red and black living legend.

The only person that Erica, the beauty with her overweening pride, respected and looked up to.

Godou only met him once, but once was more than enough for Godou to foster the same respect for him. If anyone in this world fully embodied the ideals of chivalry, it had to be him.

The strong sense of feeling when they shook hands to bid farewell was still vivid in Godou's mind.

"...Godou-san, you look happy for some reason."

Yuri spoke suddenly.

With suspicious eyes, she stared at Godou with a tinge of resentment for some reason.

"Looking into the distance, as if remembering someone you really missed very much—"

"Ah, sorry, I suddenly remembered an old acquaintance."

Responding without thought, Godou was thinking of one point.

If he, Paolo Blandelli, knew that Erica was trying to seduce Godou, he might just come up with a plan to educate that niece of his into a proper lady.

But Godou did not know how to contact him personally.

No, wait a minute, didn't he have a friend who knew these things...!

Godou couldn't help but get excited.

Even if the chances were slim, it was still worth a try, all prospects must be explored!

“I suddenly thought of urgent matters to attend to so I will be leaving first. Anyway, thanks for everything.”

“Ah, Godou-san!? Just who did you recall, I wish to know—”

In order to reach home quickly, Godou started to run.

What was it that Yuri tried to say to me just now? I guess I will just ask her again the next time we meet.

Two nights later, Godou was checking for the answer he had waited so eagerly for.

Firing up his mother’s old notebook computer to open his email , the long awaited reply finally came.

The sender’s name was Zola. The name of the mage Godou had come to know when he was at Sardinia.

“How is it?... I hope it is a good reply!”

Godou continued to pray as he opened the email.

'It's been a while, young man. I have been hearing a lot about your many deeds. Your name as a devil king sure is spreading far and wide. It makes me proud to know I played a part in your birth .'

Written in Japanese with full mastery of kanji, she opened with such an outrageous greeting.

'Next, about your request on how to contact Paolo Blandelli personally, I'm sorry but I do not know. After all, he is the leader of a famous group and the highest ranked Templar Knight. On the other hand, I'm just an old mage in the countryside. How could I possibly know personal channels of communication?'

At this point, Godou started to feel dejected, but continued to read on.

'But, I understand your dilemma and am not so cold-hearted as to just ignore it. Thus, this summer I welcome you to my humble abode here in Sardinia. After all, for a mage of Erica Blandelli's level, she would find you almost immediately no matter where you hide if she was to become serious. The only way to escape from her is with the help of an excellent mage, and I am willing to help you on this part.'

Right, it was just as she had said, this was the problem troubling Godou, and he couldn't help but nod in agreement.

'As for plane tickets and the like, just leave everything to me. You're welcome. Consider it compensation for bringing you into this kind of trouble, into this world of cause and effect. I look forward to seeing you after our last meeting a few months ago.'

Signing off her email with 'Your Friend.'

"...How superficial of me. I thought she was just a meddlesome and hopeless fellow, but I never expected her to be so considerate."

Like watching a delinquent feed a stray cat — Godou felt touched as if witnessing such a scene. He felt ashamed of his ignorance.

Friends are still the best! He felt deeply moved and thanked her from the heart.

—Everything that happened after that went smoothly.

Informing his grandfather and mother he was going on vacation alone, he made a deal with his grandfather to keep things secret, and discreetly made preparations without his sister Shizuka knowing, finally confirming the duration of his stay in Sardinia.

Then, in latter half of July, it was the day before the closing ceremony.

In contrast to Erica who was recently in a happy mood, Godou had been agreeing to the 'pre-marital trip' in a displeased and uncaring manner.

His heart burned with fighting spirit as if playing a role in a reversal drama, but he did not show any outward signs.

The plan was set in motion, calmly and silently.

This was the path to victory. Even if it was against his nature to harbor secrets, it was all needed for such a situation.

...That day, after school, Yuri said to Godou:

“Godou-san, I have something to say to you, could you come with me for a while.”

Facing the sudden cold words from Yuri while following her to a deserted corner of the school, Godou felt a sense of unknown nervousness. As if something inauspicious was about to happen, he had a bad feeling.

“...I will ask directly, Godou-san, are you going anywhere this summer?”

Godou could not tell if Mariya Yuri didn't know how the world worked or just couldn’t read the mood.

Even though she was very smart and thought things through deeply, she was just a sheltered high class lady.

Thus she was unable to read the atmosphere. But likely due to her strong natural instincts, which were sometimes very sharp, she was still able to guess at situations without doing anything beforehand.

It was the same this time.

“...If so, where are you going?”

"Even if you ask me, it is a secret, is that ok?"

Yuri was speaking as a result of sensing rather than reasoning.

There was no point in acting ignorant in front of her, Godou lowered his head as a gesture of pleading.

Even his family members didn't know where he was going... Thinking back, the grandfather and mother who allowed him to secretly plan this trip, were really quite awesome in a certain sense .

"Of course it is not ok! Without me around... No, without anyone else around, what indecent acts are you planning to do!? If you do not tell me the details, I will not let you go!"

Her words carried a sense of family greater than even his own.

Yuri's facial expression suddenly changed; she realized she had uttered rather strange concerns.

"S-So it is like this, even though I have never thought it would really happen, it is like this right...? Like going on vacation with just that woman whom you are slightly closer to... Are you planning that and making it happen?"

Why does she have such a thought? Godou was puzzled by this .

"W-Who do you mean by a girl I am closer to?"

"L-Local wife, isn't there such a saying? Forming an impure and obscene m-male and female relationship like a short term contract... I was really wrong about you!"

Her accusations could not be understood, but it was clear that she was vehemently denouncing something.

Why a local wife? Wasn't that kind of expression out of fashion a long time ago?

'—Hoho, Kusanagi-san suddenly recalling a close friend from far away, then confirming his escape route, Yuri-san can feel that right... So, Yuri-san, this could be troubling. Have you heard of the term local wife? What, you don't? It is also a form of relationship between lovers—'

Someone was talking to her behind his back, but of course, Godou had no idea.

What's more, this person was also adding fuel to the fire.

'Hoho, Yuri-san must be thinking that Kusanagi-san could not have such a relationship as he is only in high school right? But you must not forget that he is no ordinary high school student, he is a king. One of the seven who are the incarnations of demons and rakshasa[3], the king of the magi. Having the courage to undertake such an affair is not impossible—'

'Ah, there is always a counter measure. It is easy and effective... Yuri-san just has to go along. Go on the trip as a pair and monitor his actions.'

She had been fed all these unnecessary ideas, but Godou could not have known.

Due to all this, Godou can't help but feel perplexed at Yuri's vivid imagination.

"No, please think rationally, such things are out of the ordinary right?"

"Then allow me to ask you, is there an acquaintance there at the place you are going?"

"Well, sort of, yes."

"Then, is this acquaintance of yours male or female?"

"Umm, female..."

"What kind of a person is she? Is she a beautiful lady?"

"Umm, that's a difficult question to answer... Can I not answer it?"

Answering the continuous string of questions.

After listening to Godou's answers, Yuri cried out,

"Too impure, Godou-san! I actually believed in you! I actually wanted to believe in you!"

"Eh? Umm, Mariya-san? If you think about it with common sense……."

"It really is true! Hiding from me and Erica-san to have such an indecent relationship with another woman... You are too low!"

Being judged like this, Godou was deeply troubled.

To think the girl he originally asked for help would have such a peculiar misunderstanding.

If it is not clarified quickly, it could escalate dangerously. Though he didn't have a way with words, Godou needed to get through this somehow or another.

"According to Amakasu-san, if a boy tries to slide pass such a topic, it definitely means that there is something unacceptable going on!"

"Just what did that guy teach you?!"

History Compilation Committee member, Amakasu Touma.

Despite his relaxed and unfettered demeanor, Godou had always believed he was a person weird to the bone. But to think that he had done such a troublesome thing, just how is he supposed to correct the problem now?

"Mariya, please think calmly. Why are you imagining this? I really do not understand, just what kind of a person do you think I am?"

"A devil who tricks women! A sexual predator! Definitely not a normal human!"

Her tone became extremely emotional, and Yuri spoke without thought.

Just like a young child throwing a temper tantrum, Godou was greatly surprised to see this kind of side to her.

"Because even to this date, have you not done all sorts of ridiculous things!?"

"Umm, though that's not incorrect, I don't think I've done anything similar to harboring a mistress somewhere! And never will, I will never do something like that!"

Against Yuri in her current state, reasoning was useless, so Godou had no choice but to declare in such a strong manner.

By the way, if this dialogue was overheard, the listener would probably mistake it for an argument between couples.

How did it come to this? Godou couldn't help cursing his misfortune.

"If you say so... Please present the evidence."

Yuri whispered softly as she lowered her head. Godou instantly went "eh?"

"Take me along with you! Let me stay by your side, then you will prove your innocence! If you are truly innocent, then you can do that, right?"

"—What!?"

And then the closing ceremony was here.

It was the last day of the school term, but Godou did not attend school.

Early in the morning, just past six, he had finished all the preparations needed for the trip. He left his house and made his way to the bus stop.

The reason Godou didn't go to school today was because he felt worried by the fact that there was a chance that Erica might just kidnap him and hold him captive. This would ruin the entire plan and all prior effort would be for naught.

Yesterday, it took him great effort just to calm the angry and teary Yuri who was throwing a tantrum.

Facing the Yuri who was trying very hard not to show her emotions but whose eyes were clearly red from crying, he was defeated in the end. Remembering this made Godou's heart sink.

...Taking the subway, he reached Ueno station.

There at the central ticketing gate, somebody was waiting.

"G-Good morning. Umm... I will be in your care."

Most likely embarrassed about her outburst yesterday, her face was all red.

Facing Yuri whose face was as red as an apple, Godou nodded his head.

Carrying a huge suitcase, Yuri was wearing casual clothing for the first time in Godou's memory. She was wearing a white short-sleeved dress and a large hat, most likely to shelter herself from the summer sun. This set of clothes, with her white complexion, seemed to suit her perfectly.

Compared to her usual attire of the school uniform or the miko outfit, this was a refreshing, new look. It made Godou's heart skip a beat.

Remembering that he was about to go on a vacation with this beautiful lady, Godou's heart began to beat faster.

...Isn't this just like eloping?

"Th-Then, shall we go?"

"Y-Yes."

Godou and Yuri began to walk together.

For some reason, it really felt like an elopement, thinking about this made Godou deliberately look ahead, unable to look Yuri in the face. But she should feel the same way right?

Just like that, they entered the ticketing gate without saying anything to each other. In order to take the tram to Narita airport, they made their way to the main hall.

...After that, nothing special happened. Yuri finished her check in.

It turned out that Yuri and Godou were on the same flight and were even seated beside each other.

Of course, it was thanks to the secret efforts of the History Compilation Committee.

The Committee's efforts also enabled Yuri to obtain immediate permission from the Mariya household...

Most probably, the one active behind the scenes was the familiar History Compilation Committee member — imagining Amakasu Touma secretly laughing to himself, Godou couldn't help but sigh.

Putting so much effort into this, just what was he thinking?

As for his old friend in Sardinia, Godou sent an email stating that 'another person will be coming.' There was an immediate reply of 'very interesting, no problem.'

The other side was also fooling around.

Thinking he was getting trapped into a weird situation, Godou started to feel depressed, when Yuri suddenly said:

"Erm, Godou-san, about the person who would be looking after us... Just what kind of person is she? If it is possible, can you tell me about her?

Most likely unable to bear the silence, she suddenly came up with this question.

"She is a mage. On further thought, she is definitely one of the main culprits who gave me this body."

Seeking entertainment that day, her proposal lit the fuse which led to Godou having a decisive battle against a god.

Of course, there was the accumulation of various chance factors that finally led to the current result—

"...So it is like this. The person, whom Godou-san is depending on, is surely a beautiful woman."

"Umm, Mariya, you clearly have not met her yet. It is not right to have such preconceptions."

"But I must be right? Looking at Godou-san's face, I am sure. It is definitely true."

I really hope you do not apply your prescient abilities at this moment.

Facing the miko whose perceptions surpassed human wisdom, Godou shook his head.

"No, even though she is female, I never harbored those kinds of thoughts towards her. She is from the same generation as my grandfather—an old person. This is the truth!"

But despite Godou's frantic denials, Yuri only stared coldly.

"Even though what you say does not feel like a lie, but it is not the whole truth right?"

"It will take a long time to explain. Definitely not something which can be explained immediately!"

"About that point, you need not worry. Luckily, time is of abundance here. From here to Italy will take about half a day. So, no matter how long you plan to explain, I will listen to you seriously."

Finally reaching the Keisei Ueno station, they boarded the express train and secured their seats.

After reaching Narita, they made their way to the airport. Having boarded their plane bound for Europe, they would need to endure the twelve-hour flight—it was just as Yuri had said, there was plenty of time.

Just like that, together with Yuri who seemed to be in a good mood, they began to spend the long flight together.

Since it was like that, he might as well explain everything from the start, so as to prove his innocence.

"Fine, I understand. I shall start from the very beginning. I am not used to telling this type of story so please forgive me for anything that you don't understand."

"...From the beginning, you mean right from the start of everything?"

"Ah, yes. We must trace back to the spring break after my middle school graduation."

Kusanagi Godou back then was in a transition state, neither in middle school nor high school.

As it was not yet the first of May, he was still fifteen years old.

And a completely normal human who could not possibly battle a god or usurp their authority.

The few days which drastically changed the life he knew forever.

The few days where he met Erica Blandelli and many other different people, building up friendships and having battles. All of these felt so nostalgic now, the story of the beginning.

And so, Godou slowly began to tell his story.

Chapter 1 - Light from the East

Part 1

A certain night in the latter half of March, in the Nezu area of Bunkyo ward in Tokyo.

In the living room of the Kusanagi home, two old men were enjoying alcohol.

Godou was also there, sitting at a corner. But he was there only to pour the liquor, moving back and forth to deliver the bottles of warmed sake.

...With one whiff, he was able to tell if the sake was warmed to the right temperature.

Actually, this was one of Godou's skills. But to have such a skill at an age of fifteen, it doesn't feel right at all. But still, it was a skill that was trained by his grandfather from a young age.

"—So, why do you suddenly want to go to Italy?"

The one who asked this was grandfather's old friend, Takamatsu-sensei.

He was from the same generation as grandfather, a professor at a private university within Tokyo who taught western history. It was also because of this, both Godou and his sister Shizuka called him 'sensei.'

"Eh? I am only going there to meet an old friend."

The one who answered was the one who was leaving for Italy in just two days' time, Kusanagi Ichirou.

Even though he was a person who liked to travel, he had rarely left the country recently. However, during this spring, he suddenly said that he wanted to go to Italy.

And also due to that, Takamatsu-sensei specially came to see him off with bottles of alcohol.

...Grandfather also used to be a professor in folkloristics, but was already retired. Now, he passed his days leisurely. Too leisurely, sometimes. Godou really wanted to tell him off.

Even though he really wanted to thank him for doing all the household chores.

But to instill in his grandson knowledge about alcohol's taste, aroma and even origins, to be popular among all the women who frequented the shopping district (both old and young), and to frequently meet older women (which Godou believed to be beauties in the past) on the street, seeming to know many of them, Godou felt like there was definitely a problem.

"...That old friend you mentioned is a woman right?"

Takamatsu-sensei, grandfather's old friend, said with some disgust.

As a side note, this person would always say something like " you look so similar to Ichirou..." whenever he saw Godou's face. Come on, inherited DNA is bound to cause facial similarity, so please do not have these weird concerns.

"Ah, now that you brought it up, you know her too. Yes, do you remember? Lucretia Zola the Italian foreign student back when we were in university?"

"Oh, that woman. Hey, don't tell me you have kept in contact with her all this time?"

"No. It only started recently. I sent a letter to her Italian home address she gave me before, and a reply came back. That thing she left behind in Japan forty years ago eventually came into my possession. If possible, I would like to return it to her personally."

"Wait a minute! Didn't you promise Chiyo you would never see that woman again? Did you forget already?"

The conversation was getting out of hand.

Chiyo was the name of Godou's grandmother who passed away a few years back.

Back in the old days, grandfather was a handsome man. He possessed the gift of conversation to skillfully win people's hearts, perfect diplomacy, and outstanding observational skills. In other words, he was very popular with women.

And he never refused anyone.

Due to grandfather being like this, grandmother sure had it tough.

“Promise... Wasn’t it that I will not see her off at the airport?”

“It’s not that! I’m sure you remember, you’re just playing dumb. What’s more, you're not obliged to go personally, all you need is to send it over by air mail.”

Towards grandfather who was acting like he didn't know, Takamatsu-sensei pointed out the situation.

“It looks like something precious. Wouldn’t it be troublesome if it is damaged on the way there? And I also wanted to visit Italy once and have a nice chat with Lucretia Zola whom I have not met for such a long time.”

“Ichirou, do you even know how to speak Italian?”

“No, not even a word. But things will work out somehow, so it will be fine.”

If this was said by any ordinary old person, he would either be a very relaxed person, or is suffering from dementia.

But it was not the case for grandfather. When Kusanagi Ichirou was still an active folkloristics scholar, he was like a celebrity in field research. Specializing in studying different traditional arts and cultures, he would often go to various countries to investigate.

The places he went to investigate would sometimes be isolated village communities.

He was able to integrate himself into their community quickly, build good relationships with the villagers and even acquire a few village secrets which are usually not told to outsiders. What's more , most of these villages are situated in Southeast Asia, China, India and other foreign countries. He was able to easily overcome language barriers that would usually stop other people.

It could be said to be at a superhuman level.

"A precious item... Just what did that woman leave here in Japan?"

"About that, remember the group of buddies during university that would usually go on trips together? At that time, there was a certain incident concerning about a curse from a guardian god and if I remember correctly, twenty died and it caused a great commotion."

"Curse!?"

Hearing such an unbelievable story, Godou shouted out unknowingly.

Stealing a glance at his grandson, Ichirou smiled and said.

"Yes, it was a story I heard during my time at the research institute. A group of good friends went to Noto for a vacation. At that time, many, many things happened."

"I remember that it caused quite the uproar... That witch seemed to have hidden herself somewhere and did weird things."

"W-Witch?"

From Takamatsu-sensei's mouth came an extraordinary phrase, Godou was even more shocked.

A curse followed by a witch, just what happened back then?

"...It is the woman that Ichirou is going to meet, foreign student from Italy nicknamed 'witch.' A girl with a strange presence, I do not know when it started, but people started to call her by this nickname."

"However, she always smiled and answered 'Yes, I am a witch'. "

With all this said, Takamatsu-sensei started to look a little upset, while grandfather was still very happy.

Most likely reminiscing old happenings, he closed his eyes and continued:

"She was a very interesting woman. She got along well with cats and birds, was able to find lost things immediately, and predicted the next day's weather with greater accuracy than even the weather forecast... Oh, and she was very fluent in Japanese—Basically on the same level as locals such as us."

This woman, together with the younger Ichirou and Takamatsu-sensei, had gone on a hot spring trip.

During their visit to a hot spring inn at a remote village, strange things had happened.

“There were lots of people dying from heart attacks, over a span of merely half a month, with roughly twenty victims. There was neither an epidemic nor a murder incident so rumors spread that it was retribution brought about by a local earth god's curse.”

“Curse... If it were a detective story, then there must be some sort of shocking trick right?”

Godou did not dislike the detective story genre, but his grandfather simply shook his head and laughed wryly.

“Too bad, there was no trick revealed. It was just by luck that we were there on our trip. We were all in a great panic. The only calm person was Lucretia Zola. She went out that night, only coming back in the morning exhausted. When she returned, she made a 'prophecy,' that from that day onwards, nobody would die like that again. Everything was resolved.”

Such an unbelievable story. It all seemed like a lie.

But the grandfather did not appear to be joking. Takamatsu-sensei also had a serious face.

“Seems like an amazing person... By the way, why did she come here to study?”

His interest piqued, Godou could not help inquiring further.

“It was to study Japan’s ancient legends—especially legends about Yamato Takeru[4]. Actually, she was more knowledgeable about such myths and stories on legendary swords than us. Before coming to Japan, she had been researching the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table at a London university. ”

“This doesn't make sense, why would she deliberately leave a university in London to come to Japan?”

“Who knows, if you asked Lucretia Zola personally, all she did was smile and say she had her reasons.”

“That means many things happened between grandfather and this woman.”

Back when grandfather was a graduate student, he was only engaged to grandmother and they had not married yet. That grandmother subsequently forbid grandfather to see Lucretia Zola-san, which is why Takamatsu-sensei was now showing such a pained expression.

With this, Godou finally understood the whole story.

“Many things? Please do not speak so ill of me. We were just friends with mutual respect who just happened to have opposite genders. Chiyo and Takamatsu really shouldn't have had such strange misunderstandings.”

Such an honest sounding answer, it definitely cannot be trusted. Godou let out a sigh.

...Recalling the deceased grandmother's oft repeated words:

'Godou, you must never become like your grandfather. Though he is an amazing person, he had a fatal flaw from the very beginning... Ever since you were very young, Grandma has always worried about you since you resemble your grandfather so much. Even though he usually seems like a decent man, he is noted to do things lacking in common sense sometimes... Oh dear, I am so worried.'

How could she say such things to Godou who had not matured yet?

The cause of grandmother's worries, was the womanizing husband who stayed with her throughout all these years, and definitely not Godou's own actions. Godou thought to himself as he stared straight into his grandfather's eyes and spoke.

"Hey, grandpa, before I talk about other problems, isn't this a promise you have made with grandma? Why not just give it up. Please cancel the trip to Italy."

"That, I cannot do. Even if it is very unfair to Chiyo, a promise with an old friend is also very important. I've already promised her that I will personally bring the item to her."

A promise to a friend.

If that was the case, Godou had no rebuttal.

Despite being such a Casanova, grandfather had never betrayed the trust of his family. This too was one of the reasons why his male friends admired him. Whether male or female, Kusanagi Ichirou will never act unjustly towards a friend. The moment he hears that a friend requires aid, he will immediately rush over to help, even if it is outside of Japan. He possessed a chivalrous heart.

A person who valued relationships above all else.

Godou respected and admired this aspect of his grandfather's character, and wished to become such a person himself as well if possible.

"...That woman's possession, what is it? You just described it as something precious."

"About that, in the village where the curse incident happened, didn't she leave something behind? ...That night, Lucretia Zola had visited a shrine which was burned down by disrespectful locals, presented this item as an offering. After that, the curse stopped... Perhaps the curse and the witch are real after all?"

Facing Takamatsu-sensei's inquiry, grandfather left his seat and quickly came back.

Carrying a flat object wrapped in a purple cloth.

And then he placed it on the table and unwrapped it.

A B5 sized stone tablet, on it was a childish drawing. It should be a picture of a man with both his hands and feet locked up, distributed on the edges of this drawing were drawings of a bird with its wings spread out, the sun, moon and stars.

The tablet was well-worn in appearance and even had signs of being burnt.

“...A lithograph, could this be very ancient?”

Godou gave his honest opinion.

A carving left behind by primitive peoples of some place. If that's the case, it made sense.

"Probably not. For it to be an artifact unearthed from some archaeological site, its condition is too good... Though you can't rule out the possibility it is the work of some avant-garde artist."

Looking at the stone tablet with interest, grandfather answered.

“Ichirou, how did this thing come into your possession?”

“Actually that village was vacated more than ten years ago. The person who managed the shrine was troubled over how to handle the stone tablet. They had no idea how to locate the owner but was able to recall the face of one of the accompanying students, and that student turned out to be me. Through various twists and turns , they were finally able to get in touch with me.”

“After that, grandpa decided to go meet that person.”

This perfect coincidence made Godou's heart stir with feeling.

As a scholar in folkloristics, Kusanagi Ichirou had publications, thus his name was recorded in the university where he worked at the time. By getting in touch with the university, they were able to find grandfather's contact information. If grandfather had been an ordinary person in an unassuming occupation, most likely they would not have found him.

In fact, it took a lot for them to find each other again.

Godou could understand the feelings of grandfather who wished to return the stone tablet to the original owner.

However, he could not let him break the promise with grandmother like that.

After some consideration, Godou made his decision, the tablet will be delivered some other way.

"OK, I get it — I will take this stone tablet to Italy. This way, grandfather can keep his promise properly."

Seeing Godou make such a proposal, his grandfather showed great interest in his eyes, while Takamatsu-sensei looked very worried.

"Godou, are you serious? Do you know any Italian?"

"Nope, none at all. But things will work out somehow, no problem."

Godou already had several experiences of being taken overseas by grandfather.

The places visited were mostly Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam or Thailand. Getting separated from grandfather then meeting up several days later had also happened. Every time it occurred, Godou had to spend over half a day alone with no money and the difficulties of a language barrier. In severe cases, he had to wait for several days.

Having experienced such situations numerous times, Godou actually became used to it.

Language barriers could be handled by body language. This proved to work surprisingly well for communicating even though complicated meanings could not be expressed, but it brought him close to others.

Other Japanese would probably freeze if they met a foreigner in the streets and had to converse in English. In such situations, Godou would appropriately make use of however much English he knew to establish a fragmented dialogue.

...By the way, the younger sister Shizuka had also gone travelling overseas with grandfather a few times.

But she never met the things that happened to her brother, making Godou suspect if his grandfather deliberately set him up to train his grandson.

"Hoho, Godou wants to go in my stead... Can I really entrust this to you with confidence?"

A teasing smile appeared on the grandfather's face.

"That's right, a man keeps his word. It's currently spring break, so I'm bored to death anyway."

"The place Lucretia resides, though considered Italy, is actually an island in the Mediterranean—Sardinia, and is located deep in the countryside of the island's interior. I think you will have it rough."

As he watched his grandson's declaration, the nature of the grandfather's smile changed.

It gave off a feeling of praise but at the same time like playing a joke. It was a smile mixed with complicated emotions, a very joyful smile.

"I understand, then I will leave everything to you. Handle it well."

Picking up the stone tablet from the table, he placed it in Godou's hands.

Part 2

On the south side of Italy, a vacation island floated in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

This was Sardinia, an island about the same size as Shikoku[5], its population was roughly one and a half million of which over half was concentrated in the largest city there, Cagliari.

Enclosed by crystal clear seawater, the surrounding natural environment was also very beautiful.

The biggest industry on the island was tourism. Every summer, it was crowded with tourists whose purpose was to vacation in Europe. Particularly on the northeastern side, the sea shore as beautiful as an emerald was renowned as a vacation spot exclusive to the upper class nobility.

However, Godou kept his plans to come here a secret from his younger sister.

"What is going on... Onii-chan. You suddenly tell me you're going travelling. Could you have forgotten your promise to me? You're the worst."

Thanks to his grandfather, Godou suffered severe scolding from his sister.

All because of the grandfather's suggestion.

'You can tell the truth, but I don't recommend it, Godou. If Shizuka knew you were going to a prime vacation spot in southern Italy, what would she think?'

'She would want to go, or rather, she will insist in tagging along ?'

'Exactly. But even though it's Europe, travelling in those countryside places can be very troublesome. The most prosperous streets of the city would be fine, but that place is even more deserted than this shopping street in Nezu... So, I will ask you a question, travel casually alone in the countryside or bring a troublesome sister and devote your efforts to taking care of her, which will you pick?'

'Of course alone.'

He had replied without thinking.

In the end, an excuse was made to cover things up. Shizuka was told he was going to an acquaintance's Zen monastery, to work odd jobs for a week.

But for some reason, Shizuka scolded him with exceptional fury .

While Godou was preparing his luggage in his room on the second floor at home, Shizuka suddenly burst in.

"There's no helping it, mother ordered me to go there in her stead."

"Mother's orders? ...Then it can't be helped, she must have thought it was too troublesome and pushed it onto Onii-chan, that's so willful of her."

"...Yes, your willful character is probably inherited from mother as well—ouch."

"What a rude thing to say! I don't have that kind of personality like a queen!"

Clearly he was already off the hook by blaming his mother's interference, but Godou made an unnecessary comment.

Stepped on by Shizuka, Godou knew he had to be more careful with his words.

By the way, the monastery he was supposedly visiting was located deep in the mountains of Chichibu. Apparently there was once an ancestor of the Kusanagi family who was an abbot there, but he continued his life of indulgence despite monastic vows.

The monastery still maintained the tradition of drawing water from a well to use for cooking.

But at the same time, it was equipped with an industrial scale refrigerator that one would find in a winemaking business, which was stocked full of alcohol purchased from the liquor store at the foot of the mountain. Furthermore, they eschewed alcohol euphemisms like 'soup of wisdom'[6] and openly ate meat and drank alcohol.

All past abbots have been strange characters, and every single one of them was an intimate friend of the Kusanagi family.

As a side note, Grandfather Ichirou once trained there, but ended up committing all sorts of travesties, culminating in an immoral relationship with the widow of a rice shop, leaving him no choice but to flee to Shanghai. Despite dating back to the

Taishou era[7], these kinds of philandering exploits continued to be the talk of the monastery whenever Godou visited.

...Due to that kind of environment, little sister Shizuka stayed far away from that place unless obliged to take part in Buddhist rites.

Which was why it made for a viable excuse.

Thanks to grandfather's explanations, Godou was able to reach an understanding with his mother without paying any price. Normally, this would require being at her service for three hours or more.

Everything was ready.

But Shizuka was unhappily glaring at Godou—why?

"But didn't Onii-chan promise me beforehand? Couldn't you have thought up a way to refuse? So dense and slow, damn it! You're the worst!"

"P-Promise? That thing earlier counted as a promise?"

Godou was greatly surprised.

He suddenly recalled Shizuka's words a few days before the school closing ceremony.

'Onii-chan, are you free for spring break? You must be very free for sure, without club activities or a girlfriend. Yes, it is decided

you are free! So listen carefully, I happen to have a free slot in my spring break, so I plan on sharing this precious time with you, Onii-chan. First accompany me to go clothing shopping. Next there's a new coffee shop opened in Ni-choume[8], we should go there. Next is...'

Just like that, his sister forced her plans on him.

If he was actually free, he didn't mind spending time with his sister.

At the time he had paid little attention as he listened, so it didn't register.

"Didn't you say something like 'as long as I'm free'? To think you'd rather run off to a monastery instead of putting effort into squeezing time out for your cute little sister... Onii-chan, you have failed as a brother!"

"How could one fail as a brother so easily?! Besides, who goes around calling themselves cute?!"

Godou at least tried to tell her off.

He did wish his sister could act a little more lady-like.

But from an objective standpoint, it was undeniable that Shizuka was the cute type, because she greatly resembled the beautiful mother who was renowned for her looks.

...As a side note, the mother's skill with makeup had already entered the territory of gods.

Definitely in the realm of godly skills, to that Godou offered his utmost respect.

"After all, I can't possibly spend the whole spring break there. Why don't I accompany you to go out when I return home, is that ok?"

"Clearly you forgot the promise, and now you're trying to weasel out of it? It's not simply 'accompany you', but I am going out for the sake of accompanying Onii-chan, don't get it wrong!"

Sigh, this sister was making decisions on her own again.

But having known her for so long, I had grown accustomed to such willfulness.

Godou laughed wryly as he reminded himself not to speak without thinking.

"Ah, right, do you still remember Yui? My friend, the one who was relatively short."

"Yui? Yui... Is that the girl who used to come and play all the time? Now that it's mentioned, she did come to cheer for me at the competition once... Yes, I didn't forget."

Faced with the name that suddenly appeared, Godou felt greatly troubled.

Though the child with that name often followed behind Shizuka , Godou had little impression of her.

"Onii-chan, the way you are, it's not surprising you completely forgot her."

"I didn't completely forget, there are still some lingering impressions in my mind."

Godou tried to refute Shizuka's mockery of him.

"Don't force yourself, Onii-chan, you're not someone who notices my friends... Actually it's Yui who said it, if Onii-chan is free during spring break, she wanted to go out and have fun with you. How's that? Are you interested?"

It felt like his sister was deliberately playing a joke on him.

Go out with his sister's friend? Why must he do something like that?

"No, not really... I'm not interested, I think she would find me boring instead. Forget it, help me refuse her."

"Oh really, it's not easy to have someone offer you a date, what a shame."

Teased by Shizuka who suddenly seemed inexplicably happy, Godou sighed as he shook his head.

"Don't call it a date, it's just going out for fun... Spending time with someone like me will only make her bored. I don't know what your friend is thinking."

"—You're right, someone as dense and boring as Onii-chan... Clearly so unreliable and ridiculous all the time, but extremely serious in strange areas, a normal girl cannot take a fancy to you... Girls like your sister who would spend time with you are extinct. You should show me some gratitude."

"Yes, yes, I know. Shizuka is my cute little sister, and I have troubled you all this time. Is that acceptable?"

"Your tone of voice is not serious enough, and there's no sincerity, and the lines are too ordinary, completely no good. Out of a hundred, I can only give you fifteen points. Try harder, Onii-chan!"

She looked like she was complaining, but her mood seemed to be great. Though she was my sister, she was impossible to understand.

"Onii-chan's good qualities are probably limited to that physical stamina that rivals a cart horse as well as playing baseball with... I'm sorry, I said something wrong."

Originally in a good mood, Shizuka suddenly stopped.

Godou put his hand on his depressed sister's head and caressed back and forth.

"Actually I'm not that amazing at baseball. It's ok, pay no mind to it. I am really grateful to have a cute little sister like you. You don't have to be so concerned."

"B-But, I'm sorry. I got carried away and said those things."

"It's fine, those things don't matter. I've long accepted that I can't play baseball any more, don't worry."

For a brief moment, neither of the siblings spoke.

Noticing Shizuka's depression, Godou not only said things he would never say normally, but also stroked her head all this time.

Her mood slightly restored, Shizuka's parting words could never be forgotten.

"Onii-chan, I'm not asking for something expensive, but just something you chose with care will do. Buy something that will make me happy. If you pick something without care, I won't forgive you!"

She clearly knew her brother did not have an eye for picking things, and yet she made such a demand?

Godou sighed deeply.

Kusanagi Godou was now fifteen years old, just graduated from middle school, and about to enter high school.

From elementary to middle school he had always been playing baseball.

During middle school, he was the starting catcher and fourth hitter for a certain strong youth team. He also had the experience of representing Japan in overseas games as well as the Tokyo Selection Match, a World Series competition.

However, during the summer of his third year in middle school, his shoulder was injured during a group training camp for the World Series competition.

A certain pitcher who threw fastballs that were difficult to control had struck Godou with the ball while he was running from third base to home. Due to the direct impact of the ball, both his back and his right shoulder were hurt.

Though the injuries have healed, his most important weapon as a catcher, the strong shoulder was no good any more.

Disappointed by the weak trajectories of his thrown balls, Godou began to worry about his future in high school.

Even though the shoulder was no good, there were still ways to continue playing baseball.

There were actually schools that appreciated Godou's batting abilities, and invited him to join their high school teams as a batter, but he refused them all.

—After all, he had already played for nine years, it was enough.

Thus, treating the shoulder injury as an opportunity, Godou began to tell himself it was about time to try new experiences. In fact, he had already convinced himself it was true.

His baseball playing was actually not that great.

The things he said to Shizuka, about half of them were actually serious.

Since Godou had the opportunity to play baseball at the highest levels, there were many opportunities to meet those with genius talent. Compared to those who possessed true talent, Kusanagi Godou was high average at best.

So it could be said that because he didn't have enough talent, he did not insist on pursuing baseball. Participating in other sports or even cultural clubs might be acceptable.

These few months, Godou had been studying and facing examinations with that kind of attitude.

'Hey, Godou, what about me who had always lost to you? You've got to give me a chance to avenge myself! Don’t you dare run away after you had won!'

This was what his friend Miura said when he came to visit at the end of the second term during middle school senior year.

'Even if I continue baseball in high school, I probably can't hit your balls any more. Unlike me, you were born for baseball, born to be a pitcher. I think you will soon leave me in the dust, so please give me a break.'

That was how Godou replied to Miura, the one who was rated the number one pitcher amongst the youth teams.

Though they were originally from different teams, they had been assigned to the same team during the Tokyo selection match.

'Bastard! Are these the words of the fellow who defeated me? In all our confrontations, I have never been able to get you out on three strikes!'

'No, for something that's akin to cheating, pay no mind to it.'

'Cheating? What are you talking about?'

'Yes, your personality is very straightforward, so I can tell at a glance what you are thinking. Back in senior year of middle school, whenever I saw your face, I could predict how you would pitch with roughly fifty percent certainty. This was taught to me by my grandfather once, in competitions and negotiations, understanding the opponent's personality and targeting their weaknesses will basically allow you to win seven times out of ten, so it doesn't really count as true baseball capability.'

Even so, Miura continued to pester him, saying things like "let's go to that school together" or "at least pick a school with a stronger baseball team"...

But Godou chose the high school section of the nearby Jounan Academy.

His younger sister Shizuka was studying in the middle school section there, and the baseball club at this school was abysmal, so he would have no wish to play baseball there.

Removing the option of baseball from his high school life in such a semi-forceful manner, how will things turn out?

After completing his preparations for going to Italy, Godou suddenly had a strange notion.

"If I think about it, travelling overseas during such a period, it really feels like a 'soul searching' journey."

Feeling that such a delicate term suited himself poorly, Godou naturally laughed wryly.

Part 3

Comparing northern and southern Italy, their inhabitants had completely different temperaments.

Of course, this was just a general stereotype. Due to the north being rich and urbanized while the south was relatively poor, people described those in the south as more modest and friendly.

Widely known around the world as a center of various areas such as culture, economy, fashion and sports, Milan was a metropolis that exemplified the north.

And anyone acquainted with Erica Blandelli would know that she was the girl who embodied the essence of Milan.

The young mistress of the prestigious house of Blandelli where all previous generations were Milanese. Beautiful and noble, she grew up with a strict upbringing starting from an early age, and was full of wit and talent.

The beautiful young lady glamorous as a blooming rose.

"Of course, my outstanding beauty is undeniable—"

Erica smiled elegantly.

However, her smiling face bore no resemblance to a pathetic flower, rather, a more apt description would be a she-leopard or a lioness.

The proud and powerful queen of the beasts, that was how her assertive appearance was best described.

"But like the chocolate on a cake, there are many important elements adorning my being, but these alone cannot represent my complete self—so for this matter, I must decline, Uncle."

"If you put it that way, I have no choice but to consent, Erica."

The one who replied with a wry smile was her only relative, her paternal uncle.

Paolo Blandelli, whose figure could be compared to the Statue of David.

Even though he was pushing forty, he still possessed the youthful vigor of a young man, a face like a perfectly crafted sculpture, and an intellectual and noble presence.

And his perfect body was steeled through and through - as fitting for his title as the top knight.

Italy's strongest knight was the "King of Swords"—Salvatore Doni.

But the highest ranking knight was Paolo Blandelli.

There was no doubt about this fact, though the uncle humbly denied it, while the other person in question, Salvatore admitted it freely with a smile.

"I am flattered... But to make me a role model, who is the idiot who came up with this? I have no need to publicize my beauty, for there is no meaning in a pleasing exterior alone. External beauty

has to be complemented by ability and insight from within. That is the true Erica Blandelli."

"I knew you would refuse like that, which is why I came to talk to you first. I don't think it's a foolish thing."

Smiling wryly as he faced Erica, the two of them were currently in a corner of a certain coffee shop.

They were family and originally lived together in the Blandelli residence. Preoccupied with official affairs, the uncle had been away from home for many weeks, so they had not seen each other until now.

Suddenly communicating "it's been so long", they decided to meet here—

"Uncle, let's talk about something more meaningful, have you heard about the incident at Sardinia?"

"Yes, it seems to be real, the chance of a [Heretic God] descending seems likely. Our leader Sir Salvatore is in the middle of his expedition to South America and will take time to return, so it would be best to gather intelligence first, and investigate the local situation."

"Then please assign me reconnaissance duties. Uncle—No, Commander-in-Chief Blandelli of the [Copper Black Cross], the knight Erica Blandelli hereby petitions."

The Knights Templar organization had dominated Europe in the Middle Ages.

As the descendants of knights, the sons of god, as well as magi who served the demonic deity Baphomet, this dual origin was the true identity of Erica and the rest of her order. Though there were numerous magic associations which inherited the secret rites of the Templar Knights, the [Copper Black Cross], with its headquarters in Milan, was one of the strongest associations.

Unsettling incidents were occurring at Sardinia at the south of Italy.

This report arrived at the [Copper Black Cross] two days ago, brought by one of their members who happened to be there. This information likely had not spread to the vast majority of magic associations in Italy.

Which is what gave Erica the idea of petitioning to be sent there.

However, Uncle Paolo was shaking his head with a serious expression.

"You are my precious—a genius child who will one day stand at the top of the magic association. I do admit that is my personal wish. Anyway, you probably don't have any prior experience with gods, right?"

"Yes that is correct. Precisely because I have none, I want to gather experience this time."

Erica boasted without tact.

Absolute confidence in her ability was the root of that kind of attitude.

The martial arts personally taught by her uncle from a young age, as well as all sorts of magic inherited from the lineages of the Templar Knights from ancient Rome to medieval Europe.

There were very few people who could gain mastery in all these difficult techniques by the age of fifteen like Erica. In Italy, Liliana Kranjcar, also from Milan, was the only rival of the same age that Erica recognized.

"In the past, you allied with Princess Alice, ruler of the Witenagemot[9], to jointly oppose the Black Prince Alec. In recognition of your successes, you were bestowed the title of [Diavolo Rosso]. If I were to inherit my esteemed uncle's title, then I have a need to display my outstanding talents."

"I was already twenty-five years old back then, ten years older than your current age. Don't be hasty, there is still much for you to learn. If you want to approach gods, it's not too late to do so in a few years' time."

Possessing great foresight, the uncle tried to dissuade his niece with sincerity, but Erica did not accept.

"Too late. If I don't earn it now, the title of [Diavolo Rosso] that my esteemed uncle guards will be inherited by that crude and lowly Gennaro. I definitely do not wish to see the noble title of the

[Copper Black Cross]' leader fall into the hands of that kind of man ."

[Diavolo Rosso] was the title earned by Paolo Blandelli almost twenty years ago.

This was a title of honor possessed by the knight that represented the [Copper Black Cross] to outside parties. However, three months ago, her uncle had to relinquish the title due to finally ascending to the office of commander-in-chief.

It was forbidden to hold both titles of top knight and commander-in-chief, in other words, Paolo Blandelli has now retired from the ranks of knights in service.

Though Erica was known as a prodigy, she still lacked experience.

Neither her achievements nor her reputation were enough to inherit the title.

However, it would be different story if she earned accolades in the face of the greatest disasters appearing in this world—[Heretic Gods].

"...Erica, could you be intending to become a Campione?"

"I am not that full of myself. Of course, if there was a chance, I don't mind becoming someone like Sir Salvatore Doni, but that's just wishful thinking... However, I do have some ideas on how to seal a god's existence or suppress them."

"Really! If you say so, then surely you have made preparations!"

Erica nodded in a matter-of-fact manner at her uncle.

"I knew such a day would come, so I've been working hard at studying the Golgotha[10] spell words and summoning ritual. If possible, I wish to display them right now."

"Mastering the holy spear of prayer and lamentation at such an age, what a scary little brat."

Sighing as he spoke, the uncle's facial expression changed.

It was now the face of the severe commander-in-chief of the fearsome organization of the crimson knights.

"Fine, Erica. Go forth to the land of danger. Displaying courage and might is a knight's duty. Once the words have been spoken, you must absolutely complete this challenge. Do you understand?"

"Affirmative. Erica Blandelli will now set forth for Sardinia to investigate and uncover the true identity of the [Heretic God] appearing there. I will try my utmost to seal this god and restore peace to the island. Await my good news."

The uncle nodded lightly at the respectful answer of the niece.

"Looks like, being born in this peaceful era, you sure have it rough. I really hope you will learn the difference between courage and lack of forethought. I pray that you will possess trusted friends and companions to walk along the knight's path together. I

also wish your journey a success, and pray that you can give me peace of mind."

"Oh my, esteemed uncle, are you treating me as Hannibal[11]?"

Erica smiled.

Once upon a time, there was a famed general of Carthage who defeated the Roman Republic and marched into Italy.

As the greatest ancient military tactician, he was praised by the famous Roman general Scipio[12] before a decisive battle. Scipio's words were 'being born in this peaceful era, you sure have it rough .' In the ensuing Battle of Zama, the world class tactician general was finally defeated.

"Compared to the loser Hannibal, I fancy I am more like the victor Scipio—"

"This will be determined at the time when you meet the [Heretic God]. Then I shall depart first, and pray for the day we meet again after your survival."

Uncle Paolo rose from his seat, and left before Erica's eyes.

—Perhaps it was pure coincidence, but this was the same day when Tokyo's Kusanagi Godou made his declaration to go to Italy. Of course, she could not have known this.

Chapter 2 - Fated Encounters

Part 1

The Sardinia autonomous region consists of the island of Sardinia and the surrounding islands.

The capital city Cagliari is a port located on the south of the island, and was first constructed by Phoenicians in the eighth century BCE.

Even in Europe which had incomparably many ancient capitals relative to Japan, ancient streets dating back to such historical origins were very rare.

This was a relaxing street in the countryside, near the calm Mediterranean.

This was also Godou's first impression of Cagliari.

"...I'll have a stroll in this little town for today, then take the train tomorrow to the town where Lucretia-san lives."

Godou was at the hotel room booked by his grandfather in Japan.

Though it was just a little three-story inn, its facilities were well-provided, and extremely clean though not very luxurious.

Godou sat on the bed, browsing webpages for maps and travel guides about Sardinia, making his plans for the next few days.

The town where his grandfather's 'friend' lived was located in the center of the island. Godou decided to take a break here for today, since his body needed time to recover from the jet lag and the fatigue from air travel.

Having thus decided, Godou looked out the window.

It was slightly after one in the afternoon, and the Mediterranean sun gave off bright rays. The clear blue sky had not a single cloud. This kind of wide unrestricted view was not something that can be found in Japanese scenery.

If he didn't go out to enjoy the scenery, it would be too much of a shame.

As excited as if he was witnessing a sunrise, Godou decided to walk out the door and leave the room to have a look.

If he wanted to rest, he could do that in the evening. After all, he already came all this way, why not go outside and have a look?

Leaving his luggage in the room, Godou left the inn.

In order to dispel the sleepiness, let's first find a coffee shop (the Italians seemed to call them cafes) and get a coffee and some snacks. Thinking that, Godou surveyed the surroundings, but all the shops in view had their doors shut.

Just as Godou was feeling puzzled, he suddenly remembered.

Now was the time for siesta—the afternoon nap. Though the practice was no longer common in cities like Rome and Milan, it wasn't so in a place like this.

Still, not all shops were on break.

After walking a little more, a coffee shop open for business was found on a little street.

Godou's Italian consisted of the basics he learnt from the tourist guide he read on the plane, or rather, the vague impressions he retained from that.

But Godou was not a person who fretted the small details, and it was pointless to be scared in this place. Besides, staff in this vacation spot should be used to travelers, so Godou boldly stepped into the shop.

...It happened once before, at a little stall in Thailand. Godou had unwittingly ordered and eaten some super spicy fried noodles . It served as a memory of his travels.

The decor of the shop was rather plain.

There were only six or seven customers, all middle aged men or older.

No one dressed fashionably and they all had casual attire and looked very relaxed.

They were gathered in the interior of the shop, watching a broadcasted football match on an old CRT television.

Godou walked towards the bar.

The bartender who greeted him was a twenty-something-year-old youth. Godou felt a little relieved, for no matter what country, the likelihood of someone being competent in English was highest amongst the younger generation ... Of course, there were also many exceptions.

Godou used his broken Italian, aided by appropriate English to converse.

It was exceedingly simple to order a cup of Espresso, but ordering food was very difficult, because even if you looked at the menu, it was impossible to imagine what the food looked like.

Godou looked towards those elderly men, and pointed to the Italian panini sandwich one of them was eating.

Give me the same thing—that was how he ordered. The friendly Italian youth only repeated the words 'OK' throughout the entire process.

Godou poured two packets of sugar into the fresh coffee.

This was because he once heard that pouring a large amount of sugar was the Italian way. The rich and sweet flavor was quite agreeable after all.

As he pondered over this ordinary taste, Godou was shocked as he bit into the panini.

In between the two pieces of bread were prosciutto ham, cheese, as well as a kind of lettuce called rucola. However, the bread, the ham and the cheese were all particularly rich in flavor. This was absolutely delicious!

After he finished, Godou thanked the youth, settled his bill and left the coffee shop.

Then Godou began taking a casual walk around town.

Sometimes he would take out the map and ask passersby for directions.

In Japan, European and American tourists were unafraid of asking the locals for directions, so Godou decided to imitate them. He tried to ask those who looked leisurely, so as to minimize the chances of hindering someone.

Even though the local language wasn't English, communicating through gestures on the map was enough for Godou to understand other people. Wanting to see the ocean, Godou walked towards Cagliari bay.

Hanging throughout the narrow streets were fresh laundry.

Seeing these peaceful scenes, Godou's mood was very relaxed as he reached a giant church—the plaza of a Duomo cathedral. He took a short stroll there, and then left the beautiful plaza.

Starting from there, he could see Cagliari bay.

Looking into the distance, the sea stretched from one end of the horizon to another, beautiful as an emerald. This kind of beautiful ocean was impossible to see in Tokyo, and Godou felt his heart getting excited and his footsteps quickened.

Walking down a street called Via Roma, he hurried towards the sea.

Part 2

It was while Godou was taking a stroll along the sea side when he encountered the youth.

A youth was leaning against the wall of a building that resembled a warehouse, looking towards the ocean that he faced.

He gave off a strangely wonderful feeling.

It would be rude to call his attire unkempt, but that was the impression given by his coat. What was probably once a white coat , was now a dirty brown in color. The clothing itself was a bit tattered. Rather than something one would wear on this street on the sea side, it was more like something you'd find at a desert oasis .

Without any doubt, he was about the same age as Godou.

Around fourteen or fifteen years in age, with jet black hair to his shoulders, skin the color of ivory, and most important of all, he was extremely handsome.

Godou could not help but feel drawn to him. There was a kind of androgyny to his facial features, and even among celebrities, Godou has never seen a handsome youth like the one before him.

—Suddenly, the youth's gaze began to shift.

As if noticing Godou staring at him, he also looked straight back.

And then he smiled.

It was very common for Europeans and Americans to greet others with a smile the first time they meet someone and exchange glances, so Godou presumed the youth was saying hello to him.

"xxxx, xx, xxxxxx... xxxxxx."

He was using a language Godou had never heard before.

It shouldn't be English, but Godou did not have the confidence to be certain of that. Though Italian was easily understood once the vowels were emphasized, but there were many sounds which were difficult for Japanese ears to discern.

"I'm sorry, I can't understand what you are saying."

Hence Godou could only use Japanese, shrugging his shoulders in response.

In the situation of communicating as a foreigner, if gestures and facial expressions failed to communicate, then it was better to give up.

"Oh, my apologies, then I shall use thy way of speaking."

Suddenly, he was answering Godou with fluent Japanese.

Godou was speechless but could only stare at the youth's face.

"Well, hardly of significance, but a strange taste—no, dare I say smell—hangeth around thee, catching my attention, thus I spoke to thee."

The youth's voice was slightly lower than a tenor and was probably in the baritone range.

"A taste... I don't think I'm that dirty, does it smell bad?"

"Payest no heed to it, I assume I have made a fool of myself, to have asked such a strange question."

The youth spoke openly as he watched Godou checking himself out.

To ask such an embarrassing question right from the start, but then the youth did not seem to be malicious. Those words could have angered the other person, but somehow the youth did not cause a sense of displeasure, was it a question of character?

"Boy, acceptest mine apology for my misspoken words. Pray forgivest me, I mean thee no offense."

The youth smiled lightly.

His narrow eyes became even more so, and his lips curved.

A very classical smile. Rather it should be described as a smile as subtle as mist.

"You really don't sound like you're apologizing, and why are you calling me 'boy'?"

His features were very handsome, but his tone was rather arrogant, and felt like a superior talking to someone beneath his station. He was clearly about the same age, but he was calling me ' boy.'

Godou felt incredulous at this sense of imbalance.

Clearly he could speak Japanese fluently. Was it possible that his Japanese usage was not learned through regular methods?

"Though I think it's amazing how well you can speak Japanese, your usage is a little bit strange."

"Worriest not these little things. As long as communication is accomplished by speaking, it is agreeable."

He replied with a calm tone.

The strange youth's explanation made Godou smile wryly, but Godou was extremely concerned about his irregular Japanese.

"So, did you learn Japanese from watching stuff like dramas in ancient settings?"

"Never have I heard of that. This language, when was the time I learned it? No matter, it is of no consequence, as long as we can communicate."

"Then what is your name? My name is Kusanagi Godou. I think you already know, but I'm from Japan."

"Of course I remember, my name, my birthplace... Eh, what is it ?"

The youth spoke very casually.

But to this sudden unexpected answer, Godou was speechless.

"...Umm, may I ask, was your amnesia just now a joke?"

"Of course it is amnesia. Correct, I have lost all memories of the past. A troublesome condition, and most vexing."

Though Godou still felt the youth was joking, he still made a suggestion.

"If you really lost your memory, let me accompany you to the police or a hospital."

"Unnecessary, though I have neither knowledge of my name nor origin, there is no immediate problem. All I need to know is the most important thing about myself."

"The most important thing?"

This was a strange person. Confirming this in his heart, Godou continued to question.

Whether or not he was speaking the truth all along, this youth definitely counted as a 'super' strange person. How expected of foreign lands, with vastly increased chances of meeting weirdos.

"Yes, I am the victor. Victory is always in my hands. That is my nature. Facing any kind of conflict or enemy, unchangeable and unshakeable is my victory."

"...Really."

This extremely arrogant declaration was uttered from the youth's mouth calmly and simply.

This guy's speech is completely unpredictable. Though Godou was slightly taken aback, he also felt a little impressed.

"It is true, I have long sought the taste of defeat for all this time, but none hath ever prevailed against me. By the way, whenever I start fighting I lose myself, and cannot avoid getting all serious..."

Sighing as he gazed into the distance, the youth suddenly made a suggestion to Godou:

"How about it? Art thou interested in competing against me? Canst thou amuse me for a while?"

"Anything, as long as thou art good at it. Games, martial arts, a battle of wits, horse riding, anything. By the way, this place seemeth to be near Greece, I remember that country hath a kind of

competition that made use of the entire body, rather interesting. Dost thou have something thou art good at?"

Issued a challenge like that, of course one couldn't back down.

And so Godou and the youth began to search for a place that could be used for them to compete.

Walking near the port, the two of them soon reached a corner of an empty field. Gathered there were about ten-odd youngsters who worked at the pier. They were playing street football, probably during a break or after work.

This was probably their playground.

Fishing nets were hung everywhere, and seemed to be used as football goals.

Right now there were two nets in use, and two teams were competing. At one of the temporary goals, Godou found a set of rather familiar equipment.

A baseball and a metal bat, as well as several baseball gloves.

"...Come to think of it, professional baseball also exists in Italy."

Recalling this, Godou began to mutter to himself.

Compared to the overwhelming popularity of football, baseball was like a flickering candle in the wind. The level of professionals was also rather dismal, but at least the sport existed.

"Oh, thy talent lieth yonder, I look forward to it."

"Ah, no, that's..."

Taking notice, the youth walked towards the equipment.

Though for an instant Godou wanted to stop him, but he quickly gave up. After all what was to follow was a low level competition. It was unlikely to worsen the condition of his shoulder.

During this time, the youth had already started conversing with the group of youngsters in fluent Italian.

Probably negotiating with the youngsters to borrow the equipment. Not long after, the youth made a thumbs-up sign and smiled. Negotiation successful.

"Good, preparations are complete. Pray tellest me, how is this played?"

"Oh, one side pitches the ball while the other strikes it with the bat."

Catching the ball thrown by the youth, Godou explained.

...This feeling from so many months ago.

Godou looked at the baseball clutched in his right hand.

The powerful shoulder which denied base stealing even from relatively formidable runners... Godou had already lost it.

"...Yes, it appeareth thou art more suited for this side."

Watching the hesitating Godou, the youth tossed the bat over.

"It is fine to sigh over an old injury, but treatest it not as a mark of shame. Getting injured is a natural part of the warrior's path. Only those who doth not fight remaineth uninjured. This is proof of thy past battles. "

How does this guy know about my injury?

Godou stared at the youth's face, shocked, but his opponent was not showing any pity in his expression.

Pity... Faced with a constant barrage these past few months, all he could do was act troubled and thankful with a superficial response like 'what a disaster...' It felt terrible, but somehow this youth did not make him feel that way.

Those extremely cool eyes carried an intense sense of pride.

What kind of person would have eyes like those?

Solemn and majestic. This was a warrior—as described by the youth himself.

"Hoho, actest not surprised. I am the one embodying battle and victory. As long as thou hast obtained results through battle, be they good or bad, I can discern it. Boy, there exist warriors who

continueth fighting in spite of wounds or over exhaustion. There was once this person who judged it time to throw down their weapon, but that fellow choseth not to run. A true warrior."

The youth smiled, but not in the faint and distant manner just now, but rather grotesquely. It was the first time for Godou to see such a smile.

Silently he accepted the bat. Who is going to lose to you? For some reason, his heart kept repeating that line.

"Excellent! Good boy, good warrior! Quick, makest haste and beginest the match!"

Once again, he returned to a child-like demeanor.

It was also the first time for Godou to meet an opponent who went through so many facial expressions so quickly.

Godou gradually began to take an interest in him.

"OK, then I will hit the balls you pitch. If the ball is thrown somewhere beyond my reach it's invalid. If I swing the bat and either miss or hit a ball rolling on the ground, then I lose for that pitch. How's that?"

"Soundeth disadvantageous for you, wilt thou be fine? I am very strong."

The two gazed at each other and smiled happily.

Who would have predicted one day I would pick up a baseball bat again in this foreign land?

The unexpected match gradually made Godou excited.

Part 3

The result of the match was very surprising.

Godou was able to hit the first few balls and was winning in the beginning, but he began to lose, all the way to the end.

The youth was throwing the white ball with a very sloppy posture.

However, the balls flew hard and fast. In terms of control, their trajectories could also be described as no less than perfect.

Even amongst those of Godou's generation, no other pitcher could throw such balls. Middle school's Miura who greatly surpassed Godou in natural talent, as well as the monstrous pitchers he met on trips to Korea and Taiwan, none of them were able to hold a candle to this youth on the island of Sardinia.

His height not quite 170cm, the youth also had a very slim build .

However, the strength of his pitches cannot be matched.

"Are you sure you've never played baseball before?"

"Yes, today is the first time, and it seemeth rather amusing."

With over thirty balls pitched, the vast majority ended in missed swings.

The youth's pitching posture was without a doubt improvised, and he did not appear to have any prior training. However, his actions looked so natural.

Clearly so random, but his motions were very elegant, and the result were straight fastballs with substantial power.

After the bat missed, the balls continued with momentum that seemed as if it would break the fishing net.

"Damn it, it's no good, can we have a break? Let me come up with a strategy."

Beginning to pant, Godou asked for a time out.

Genius? Was this what one called a real genius? No, Godou felt it wasn't. The youth before him who claimed amnesia was not someone who could be described so easily with a simple noun—there was a feeling of something out of the ordinary here.

But no matter how fast the balls flew, they weren't completely impossible to hit.

The first step is to get the eyes used to that level of speed. That said, even when he was the fourth hitter, Godou was unable to hit straight fastballs thrown with such power. What should he do?

"Hohoho, panickest not. I am the one who is strongest and defeats all opponents. I merely wish to have a good battle, so please takest as much time to think as thou needst."

Clearly words of such arrogance, but Godou could not find a retort.

In addition, the youth looked as if he wasn't even trying—Godou could not accept losing like this, he must find a way to turn things around!

...Though the nearby youngsters were playing football some distance away, the youth's pitches were too amazing, and very soon, all of them had gathered beside him to watch.

Seeing Godou taking a break, they slowly surrounded him.

And then the youngsters of Cagliari also took part in the competition.

Still, no one could beat the youth. Let alone scoring a good hit, even touching the ball was impossible for them.

"Who the heck was that guy...? If someone described him as inhuman, it's believable."

After pitching over a hundred powerful fastballs, the youth's breathing remained regular.

Neither did the power of control of the pitches waver.

Watching the youth defeat the local youngsters so easily, Godou was very shocked.

Soon after, it looked like they were preparing to play football. The Italian young men put their arms around Godou and the youth's shoulders and walked towards the football.

"Hey, could you ask them a question for me. Is this OK for them not to go to work? It looks like they are playing too much."

"Freteth not such minor matters... This couldeth be their way of doing things, is there not a saying 'do as the Romans do'? Thou goest and enjoyest thyself."

Seeing Godou worry, the youth smiled candidly.

"Fine, whatever." Feeling that brisk Latin atmosphere, Godou gave up on the answer.

Perhaps it was because he had grown accustomed to the ridiculous personalities of his grandfather and mother, as well as the influence of their friends. Though Godou thought himself to have a very serious character, he found himself possessing rather generous tolerance to meeting such a frivolous and strange character.

If so, just do as the youth suggests and don't over think things, go have fun without worry.

Wearing either t-shirts or vests, the Italian young men were most likely laborers. In other words, the majority of them were

strongly built with arms, heads and backs akin to the statue of David. For an instant, Godou felt intimidated but he immediately got used to it.

Godou and the youth joined the same team, and started playing street football.

Even in football, no one could defeat the youth.

Nimbly weaving the ball through his opponents, assisting his teammates near the goal by passing the ball through the narrowest of openings, and personally scoring spectacular goals. Though he called it 'my first time' let's just ignore that. Anyway, that was the kind of performance he gave.

In the endgame, the youth took the ball past five defenders and ended the match with a perfect curve ball shot at goal. His figure was like a god's.

"Fantastico! Fantastico! Figlio Del Sole!"[13]

A most emotional youth cried out.

Ending the match without any regrets, the group surrounded the youth, cheering with smiling faces and emotional tears. Lavishing him with Latin style praise such as calling him a genius and born of the sun.

Soon, the sky gradually darkened.

The slowly setting sun gave the harbor a shade of orange, and the two of them bid the Italian youths farewell. (In the end, they showed no signs of getting back to work, so it was pointless to ask.)

The youth traded glances with Godou, and they smiled at each other.

"...Though it was a strange day, but I was very happy. How about you?"

"I too am happy. Such games are not bad once in a while."

Godou who never thought himself the sociable type, was surprised to find himself getting so familiar with the youth in such a short time, without even knowing his name.

However, it was not an unpleasant feeling.

It felt like the days when he was still playing baseball and getting along with this team mates...

That was the kind of friendly feeling he got from this youth.

"I will be travelling inland tomorrow. What are you going to do next? If you plan on staying here for a while, let's meet again when I come back."

"Yes, I too have things that I must do..."

"Didn't you say you lost your memory, what are you planning on doing? What's the matter, just play football with those people just now. Or maybe even a proper baseball game with nine players on each side, but a much wider space than this pier would be needed."

"Oh? Thou hast lost the match, yet thou hast not learnt thy lesson?"

The two chatted and laughed together.

Sunset on a harbor street.

A little sea side road illuminated a bright shade of orange.

The day was about to end. If possible, Godou really wanted to spend more time with this youth. Consumed with that thought, he became even more talkative.

Which was why he failed to notice the shadow in the road ahead.

This shadow was in the shape of a beautiful young lady.

By the time Godou noticed her, she had already begun the conversation.

"Excuse me, the person who is walking there—I'm very sorry for the sudden intrusion, but I have something to ask."

It was being said in Italian.

Of course, Godou completely failed to understand, but at that moment his attention was completely drawn by the girl who appeared before him.

Just barely over 160cm, her height was not especially tall for European standards. However, there was a certain sense of dignity , how should one put it? Proud like a queen, standing there with such an imposing presence.

Her long blonde hair fluttered against the sea breeze.

Dressed in red, under the glow of the orange sunset and in contrast to her long blonde hair, the impression of the red color was especially intensified.

Red like a burning flame and hair the color of gold, it was like the crown of a warrior, majestically perched upon her head.

However, all this aside—the most important feature was the girl's beauty, from which Godou could not tear his eyes away.

Beautiful features as if the result of delicate craftsmanship, better proportioned than any doll, livelier than any model or actress, and completely saturated with nobility and self-confidence , it was a face one could never forget after seeing once.

"Please tell me all about the god that has appeared on this island. My name is Erica Blandelli. Consider it a return gift, as there is no need for you two to report your names."

After a few days, it finally occurred to Godou.

If he knew she would say something so arrogant, he would never have let himself be attracted to her.

Part 4

"...Hey, what is that girl saying? She looks very serious."

"She wanteth us to confess everything we know. Simply put, it is a threat."

"Threat?"

This dialogue between Godou and the youth, took place in Japanese of course.

Hearing that, the blonde young beauty frowned with displeasure.

For even this kind of expression to be beautiful as a painting, this girl was very amazing.

Wearing a red top with black shorts, her clothing was a little ordinary despite her great beauty. However, due to the tasteful combination it felt very natural and unfettered, perhaps it was her unparalleled beauty and figure that caused one's opinion of her attire to improve.

"...All roads lead to Rome. Do as the Romans do. What regrettable sayings. You are too foolish to come here with clearly no knowledge of Italian."

The girl spoke again, a little furious.

Ignoring the rather rude content, this time she spoke with very fluent Japanese. Perhaps she was in a bad mood because her cool entrance was spoiled.

"I would like to ask you about the [Heretic God] incidents that appeared all over the island of Sardinia about three days ago. Bosa, Orgosolo, Barumini... You were sighted in all the places where divine presences were confirmed. This cannot be coincidence, right ?"

The girl finished speaking and looked at the youth beside Godou.

The places she mentioned were most likely locations on the island of Sardinia. Then that 'you' she was referring to must be that youth.

Then again, what did she mean by [God]? Completely baffling.

"I am Erica Blandelli, Great Knight of the magic association Copper Black Cross of Milan. Even in this remote place in the south, there are members of our association, and the person sighted I mentioned just now is him."

Magic association and god. Hearing these strange terms, Godou felt troubled.

However, her tone of voice was too natural, and surprisingly there was no sense of dissonance.

"—Who on earth are you? Though it isn't apparent, could you be a mage? A priest or deacon of some religion? If that's the case, there is nothing unusual about successfully summoning a [Heretic God] by chance. Anything wrong with my speculation?"

Erica Blandelli was smiling with great arrogance.

This was the first time Godou ever saw such a conceited smile on a woman. How could she be so haughty, yet so glamorous at the same time? Godou couldn't help but sigh at those two points.

"Ah, I've waited for you for so long, and yet you respond with silence? No other way then, peaceful negotiations end here and it's time for battle. Trying to talk sense into people who cannot communicate is like casting pearls before swine."

With such instigating tones, how was it ever peaceful in the first place?

And then Erica continued:

"Come, lion of steel. The one carrying the spirit of the lion, the steel that carries the essence of battle! Respond to my hand and voice! Your name is Cuore di Leone... The warrior inheriting the name of the lion-hearted king!"

What happened in the next instant, completely overturned Godou's common sense.

"The knight Erica Blandelli swears thus, I will return your loyalty with my valor and chivalry!"

The sword that suddenly appeared.

The silver body of the blade was slender and elegant, like a beam of clear light bathed in the rays of the setting sun.

"If you are someone involved with gods, you must have heard of the mighty names of Erica Blandelli and Cuore di Leone? I have no wish to use the red and black techniques against a nobody. Hurry up and tell me all you know with efficiency, swiftly and obediently."

And then, Erica thrust forward before her the sword that was like a piece of art.

Of course, it was targeting Godou and the youth who showed a faint smile.

"...What was that just now? Is that a parlor trick?"

"Thou mayst consider that level of magic a parlor trick. It is not a particularly amazing spell."

Sword, god, knight, magic, mage—! Come on, what were all these terms.

Godou was very surprised. This was twenty-first century Italy, not medieval Europe during the dark ages. How could all these unreal terms appear?

"Thou art an unruly little lady. To point a sword at me, even for warriors in the past, none have dared such barbaric acts towards me. The ignorant are truly terrifying."

"Ah, so confident in your own abilities?"

Towards the wryly smiling youth, Erica proudly puffed her chest.

The tip of the sword was waving about like the tail of an animal . Even someone like Godou who knew nothing about swordsmanship could tell that it was the motions of an impending attack.

"If you'd like, I can prepare a sword for you. I, Erica Blandelli, will never let anyone escape from a duel of the sword. What do you say?"

Hearing her conceited words, Godou swallowed a mouthful of air.

From the sword stance of this beautiful girl, she should be very skilled.

Only someone who had reached a certain level of mastery could have such elegant poise, a functional beauty resulting from eschewing all of the unnecessary. Godou could feel that this level

of cool and imposing presence could not be simply the result of a beautiful appearance.

"Thy proposal interests me, but sadly enough, I have no leisure to spare."

"I see. There has never been a person who refused my invitation . To think I would have a first experience of rejection in such a place, how insulting."

"Hoho, thou shouldst not say it so, I shall play with thee one day. But now—"

The youth said to the elegant but regrettable Erica:

"A more troublesome fellow is coming!"

A sudden development occurred immediately afterwards.

BOOOOM!!

An extremely loud explosion was heard.

To Godou who was already greatly shocked by the events so far —

He was now doubting his own sanity, but who could blame him ?

A gigantic [Boar] roughly fifty meters in body length had suddenly appeared in the sea, and was landing on the coast in a very strenuous manner, knocking over the surrounding buildings.

This kind of scene was appearing before his eyes.

Not only Godou, but the sword-wielding Erica was also frozen.

What was this? Could a scene seemingly from a monster movie be reality?

Totally at loss, Godou found his hand being grabbed at that instant.

"Hey, boy, runnest! Makest haste and escapest!"

The youth yelled as he ran, pulling Godou by the hand.

In order to numb his thoughts, Godou followed and ran without thinking. So when he finally became aware of the dreadful conditions they were running towards, he broke out in cold sweat.

"W-Wait! That direction you're running towards is too dangerous!"

"No matter what, our escape route was blocked by the sword. This is the so-called tiger at the front door, and something at the back. Makest thy decision quickly! Only by charging into danger can there be chances of survival."

Even under these circumstances, the youth was yelling joyfully.

The place where Godou was being led to was exactly where the [Boar] was rampaging.

Probably the most dangerous place in Cagliari at the moment.

"W-Wait up! I have unfinished business—"

"If fate allows it, we will meet again! Goodbye!"

Miss Erica seemed to be yelling something, but the youth continued pulling Godou's hand as they ran.

The fur and hide of the gigantic [Boar], was as jet black as darkness itself.

Whenever the black giant beast stepped upon the ground of the harbor, the earth shook violently.

"Roar!" Every time it howled, windows in buildings vibrated, and then shattered.

Whenever it charged, multiple buildings or warehouses were demolished like small scale miniature models.

From somewhere a fire started.

Probably flammable oil kept in some storage.

The disastrous fire gradually spread, and the harbor looked as if it was being licked by crimson tongues, then swallowed. Slowly the fire grew to a point where it looked like everything was going to be burned down.

"...Thanks to this great fire, that troublesome woman probably gave up."

Godou stared at the burning blaze as he spoke with a bitter face.

The girl called Erica had disappeared in the smoke about ten minutes ago. Seeing that she has not followed, perhaps it was time to head towards a safe direction.

Currently, Godou and the youth's location was at a corner in the harbor surrounded by fire.

Though there was no immediate danger, the fire was gradually spreading.

Furthermore, a couple hundred meters forward was the most terrifying [Boar].

All surrounding buildings that could be destroyed were already gone, but the beast did not charge over here. If it were to do so, Godou and the youth would probably have their lives snuffed out like candles in the wind.

"If this continues, we are going to be burned to death. How could we have escaped to such a place?"

"If we escape before the flames devour us, there is no problem—that is the truth."

Retorting against Godou's complaints, the youth was surveying the surroundings.

Annoyingly, the guy's handsome face still carried a relaxed expression.

Despite the massive fire burning away so near, the youth did not have single drop of sweat. In contrast to Godou who was soiled by sweat and ash, the youth maintained his pure and pristine look.

"Starting from just now, what are you doing? It looks very strange, did something happen?"

"Yes. Actually I heard cries for help, it should not be my imagination."

Godou perked his ears but could not hear anything similar.

"I can't hear anything like that. You must be mistaken."

"No, impossible—I see!"

Suddenly the youth began to take action.

The direction he was heading towards, was exactly the place the giant [Boar] was destroying.

"Where are you going? That place is dangerous."

"Haha, if thou art afraid, pray returnest first. Forcest thyself not!
"

The youth smiled as he charged forward.

Godou hesitated for an instant, and then ran in pursuit.

If they separated now, very likely he would not see him again. Most importantly, he had to carefully witness the reckless actions of this youth, thus Godou decided.

Running after the youth, Godou strove to move his footsteps.

Weaving through debris, kicking away stones, avoiding the scorching flames, coughing and tearful from smoke inhalation, and overcoming many difficulties, they ran for about five minutes.

The youth finally stopped.

His path ahead was blocked by many collapsed piles of construction materials.

About an hour ago, these construction materials were piled in neat stacks up to roof height along the rows of warehouses.

However, it was now a mountain of debris, and the intense fire was devouring the surroundings. The present challenge was most difficult to overcome.

Without appropriate equipment, there was no way to advance.

At this time, Godou noticed there were human voices on the opposite side, crying and calling for help.

From the sound, it was probably not just one person, but several or even a couple dozen.

"Hey, boy. Thou recallest this location? This was the place where we were playing."

The youth's sudden question made Godou instantly remember.

It was just as he said, this was the empty field where they had been playing football with the young men near the pier several tens of minutes ago. The warehouse had collapsed, mostly due to the [Boar]'s rampage. Then it later caught fire, resulting in the current situation.

"Those fellows likely failed to escape in time, and could only cry for help in sorrowful voices."

"Those fellows? ...Could it be the ones we were just playing with at the pier!?"

"Yes, the same. The ones we met are crying for help, and their voices have reached mine ears. This is one of my abilities, no mistake about it."

Beyond the massive pile of debris, something like Italian voices could be heard.

Of course, the meanings were unknown, but it was easy to imagine them as cries for help.

Godou tried to find an alternate path around the debris, but was unsuccessful.

Godou tried to find a path through the debris, but was unsuccessful.

Godou tried to find a way to avoid the burning heat, but was unsuccessful. Complete failure!

"What should I do?! How can they be saved?!"

He couldn't help roaring in anger.

Disregarding the burning fire, there was also the [Boar] several dozens of metres ahead, engaged in destruction. Godou felt indignant. Due to that monster, how many people have been sacrificed?

Thinking that, his heart lit up in anger.

Watching Godou, the youth smiled smoothly.

"Thou seekest to save others before securing thy own safe escape. Thou art a boy with admirable qualities. Thy sense of justice is worthy of ten poems of praise bestowed by me."

"Idiot, is this the time and place for something like that? Don't joke with me!"

"I jest not. I shall save those fellows, restest assured... Boy, though the duration was short, but I am happy. Thou hath my thanks."

The red flames illuminated the handsome face of the youth.

Noticing a sense of solemnity, Godou was silent. What on earth, what was going on with this guy? Why was there such a sudden feeling of greatness? —It was very strange.

"Hoho, to have amused myself so much with a brat amongst the mortals, was truly unexpected. On a whim, I could not help but lead him around for fun, but it is almost the end. I must finish my mission. If fate willeth, let us meet again. May peace be with thee."

The youth who should be shorter than Godou, was somehow looking downwards at Godou.

However, there was no sense of dissonance.

The youth before him currently gave off a very admirable and blindingly brilliant feeling, and it was impossible to think he was an ordinary human. He must be a very special existence.

"Thou mayst leave now, boy. The direction thou followest hath no vortex of flame, only stable mortal life. Righteous character will not lose the light's blessing, thou shouldst go straight ahead. "

And then he walked towards the debris where the people crying for help were.

His finger pointed in the opposite direction, and then Godou felt his body turn and walk there by itself, and then began to run! What was going on!?

Shocked, Godou desperately tried to stop his own footsteps.

I can't leave just like that, Godou strove to resist.

"What a stubborn brat, thou resistest my spell words."

"W-Wait a minute, give me a second. How can I run away alone ? If I'm escaping you must come along, as well as the people on the other side. So—"

"Thy thoughts are sufficient. I do not need thy assistance, because thou wilt only get in my way. Makest haste, escapest."

The youth pleaded in gentle tones.

"Such a shame to have lost my name. If my name was called during times of crisis, my blessing will be obtained. If I were my past self, I would never leave this holy phrase as parting words! So friend, I shall gift these words to thee—farewell! Makest haste and run!"

The result was, this was the end.

As the youth finished bidding farewell, Godou's legs ran automatically.

Impossible to stop, impossible to resist.

Fleeing from the threat of the fire and the [Boar], running at full speed in a direction where there was no road.

Unable to save the youth, or those people trapped at the fire—these thoughts made Godou very depressed, but he could not stop his footsteps.

Soon after, not knowing how he ran, Godou escaped from the fire. For a moment he forgot his guilt for escaping by himself, and deeply exhaled in relief.

—What followed immediately was despair.

At some point in time, Godou had arrived at the Duomo cathedral he passed by in the afternoon.

The great cathedral standing there.

The place of worship to pay respects to the divine, and offer one's prayers.

Beside the quiet and pious structure, a massive beast stood there, several dozens of meters tall, just as big as the Duomo cathedral—the giant black [Boar].

So well-built that it looked slightly fat, with a strong and vigorous body.

The unexpectedly slim limbs, and a mouth containing frighteningly large tusks.

A creature completely unlike the related animals that Godou knew about.

No matter how lively a boar, none were as ferocious or grotesque as this one. Its brutality made one think of a god, Godou had never met anything so frightful in his life!

Compared to this stone built church, this [Boar] was the true divine existence.

God of fury, god of destruction, god of jet black darkness.

Shock and awe and fear, this time Godou's body was entirely frozen.

ROAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

ROAAAAAAR!

After several roars which made the earth shake and the air tremble, the [Boar] pulverized the Duomo cathedral like an art piece made of paper. Godou stared at the scene stupefied.

Pieces of stone debris fell from the sky like hail.

This was far too dangerous! Just as Godou thought that, a gust of wind blew.

At first it was a light refreshing breeze, but then it immediately strengthened into a gale, soon turning into a tornado.

"...Wind? —Now wasn't the time to be so casual!"

Yelling, Godou immediately left the scene from the [Boar] and the church.

The strange thing that happened afterwards, probably won't be forgotten for a lifetime.

It was a duel between the tornado and the black [Boar].

In the area around the plaza of the Duomo cathedral, there were many of Cagliari's historic buildings.

Like the Torre dell'Elefante[14], Torre di San Pancrazio[15] and others... There were also many Gothic and Baroque churches from the Middle Ages.

At the location of these historical buildings, the tornado formed just now had swept the giant [Boar] into the air. How strong were the winds in this tornado?

Devoured by the spiraling storm, the [Boar] was suspended in midair.

Surrounding it, Godou witnessed the sudden arrival of golden flashes of light. Swiftly and sharply, golden arcs sliced the [Boar]'s body into pieces.

Gaaaaaaaah!

The [Boar]'s roars filled the air, sounding like final death cries.

Losing support, the massive black body fell onto the ground, resulting in an extremely terrifying crash, collapsing a tower in the process, scattering stone pieces everywhere, and demolishing many houses.

And then the [Boar]'s body slowly turned into grains of sand and collapsed.

The one that swept these grains of sand was the murderer—the tornado. It gradually subsided, turning into a strong gust of wind, taking away with it the sand which the [Boar] had turned into.

What remained were the streets which had turned into hell.

Seriously damaged streets, the fire still raging at the pier, as well as people in chaos.

People who only cared to escape. People who stood frozen. People praying to God. Crying, angry, terrified, hurt, sighing people.

Amongst these crowds, Godou walked by himself shakily.

At some point in time, the sky had turned black. In the broken streets at night, Godou wandered aimlessly alone.

What happened to that youth and the young men at the pier? He really wanted to know they were safe. He wanted to know their current condition. Propelled by these thoughts, Godou searched and wandered everywhere.

In the end, he failed to meet any of them.

Part 5

The next morning, the newspapers at the inn gave Godou a complete shock.

It was a newspaper based in southern Sardinia with Cagliari as its central focus, but yesterday's incident was not reported.

There was a report and picture about a fire at the harbor, but after asking the innkeeper who knew English, all Godou got was an answer like 'Yesterday there seemed to be a fire at the harbor area. You got caught up in it, right? How unfortunate!" And then a pat on Godou's shoulder.

Asking the others, no one in the inn knew about the [Boar] or the tornado.

Godou wanted to ask them in detail, but his verbal expression skills were not enough. Filled with doubt, Godou settled his bill at the inn and left. Everything that happened yesterday should have been real.

Anyway, let's go to the site of the incident, so Godou left for the Duomo cathedral plaza.

The demolished church, the destroyed streets.

Construction workers were silently hard at work performing repairs. Who knows how long it would take to restore everything to their former appearance.

"It really wasn't a dream..."

Godou muttered as he looked at the disastrous scene.

Next it was time to check out the pier, but just as he made that decision a voice called him.

"How casual of you to continue staying in this city. Where's the person who was with you back then? I am looking for his whereabouts, can you assist me?"

Cagliari, damaged and destroyed everywhere last night.

The one who appeared here was the blonde girl dressed in red—the owner of that unforgettably beautiful face.

"...What, it's you."

Her name was something like Erica Blandelli.

Having a poor impression of her, Godou responded very coldly.

"Ah, where's the greeting? I've heard that the Japanese are very big on manners, could I be wrong? Or perhaps, it's you who is ignorant?"

Erica spoke scathing words in an elegant tone.

Even for someone like Godou who was unaccustomed to handling girls, he could not stop himself from retorting. Frowning, and using as malicious a tone as possible, he counterattacked:

"I've also heard that Italians were very amiable, but you don't seem to have that kind of gentleness."

Silently they stared at each other for a moment.

Very obviously, Erica's mood turned for the worse, but it was the same with Godou.

"If you were a gentleman, then I can lavish as much gentleness as you want. However, for you to act with such an attitude towards a lady, unacceptable, completely unacceptable, you fail."

"At least in the place I was born, girls who threaten others with swords are not considered ladies. This is due to your own brutality , do not blame others."

And so, this was Kusanagi Godou and Erica Blandelli's first conversation, which took place in the worst of conditions. Though neither of them were actually the type to say such offensive words on a first meeting, but the current situation was the worst.

"Just an underling of a mage who summoned a [Heretic God], how dare you speak to me in such a manner?"

"Mentioning that again? You've been going on and on about gods since yesterday, what are those? Could you please communicate with words that normal people like me can understand? You've been saying incomprehensible things all this time, and it's making my mind very confused!"

Godou furiously said those words.

Hearing those complaints, Erica simply smiled, and then held out her hand.

Clutched in her hand, was the travel bag on Godou's shoulder.

Directly pulling it over to her, Godou completely could not resist her monstrous strength. Godou was very surprised that he would lose to such a slender girl in strength.

"Look, what is this? A holy relic giving off divine power—even for us magi of the Copper Black Cross, rarely will we possess specimens of this high caliber."

What Erica took out from the back pack, was the stone tablet.

B5 in size, wrapped in purple cloth, on it was carved a rather childish drawing that left one with deep impression. The object that some female friend of grandfather had brought to Japan—

"Ah, hey! Give it back! That's not mine. I came specifically from Japan to return it to the original owner."

"The original owner? This person is on the island of Sardinia?"

"Yes. Speaking with such arrogance starting yesterday, you don't seem normal no matter how I look at it!"

"...Such harsh criticism aimed towards me, I shall punish you in a little while. But first, I have a question for you, please tell me the name of the original owner."

Like an owl having sighted its prey in the middle of the night, Erica's eyes were flashing with light.

"A divine artifact belonging to a group who summons [Heretic Gods], I am very interested in this owner... Quickly, or would you like to be threatened by a sword again? While I'm still feeling generous, it would be wise for you to confess everything, yes?"

Erica's eyes were as sharp as swords, though her tone was full of false gentleness.

Godou was about to act in defiance when he suddenly realized.

Gods, magic, the mysterious youth, Erica Blandelli.

There were so many inexplicable things happening to him yesterday and he needed to obtain more information in this area.

In the absence of that youth, the only source of information was this girl.

"...She seems to be called Lucretia Zola, and is currently living at a place inland called Oliena. I was preparing to head there myself."

Making his decision, Godou explained directly.

Hearing that, Erica frowned and stared at Godou.

'Lucretia Zola? The Witch of Sardinia? An evil mage underling like you, going to meet her? ...How suspicious."

Kusanagi Godou and the mysterious youth.

And now it was Kusanagi Godou and Erica Blandelli.

These two encounters, who could have expected them to develop into an event that would rock the world and the gods—but at this moment it was only the southern Italian countryside—just a scene on the island of Sardinia.

Chapter 3 – Witch of Sardinia

Part 1

"So you only met that boy by chance, and have no relation to him. That stone tablet also came into your possession by chance, and you specifically came here to return it to its original owner..."

Sitting on the same bench was Erica, listing these facts out with a melodic voice.

By the way, Godou was sitting on the left side while Erica sat on the right, separated by a fairly large distance.

"You really think I will believe such lies? Be a little more realistic if you're going to lie."

"I am not lying and everything is the truth. Everything happened by chance. I don't care if you believe it or not!"

Faced with this girl who has been mocking him all this time, Godou responded with a very annoyed expression.

Travelling with a woman like this, you've got to be kidding! No matter what, he must find a way to get rid of her.

"By the way, what are you, both a mage and a knight? Either one of these alone is already very unusual. For you to have both titles at the same time, it's idiotic! Even online games don't offer such ridiculous settings like yours."

Occasionally dabbling in chess and go, Godou did not actually play online games. Even so, he knew a little about the content of online role-playing games.

Which is why he naturally recalled strange terms like mage, knight, god, etc...

"To compare me, a descendant of the Templar Knights, with those fabricated games? I can see that you not only fail as a gentleman, you don't even have basic manners. How pitiful!"

"I don't even want those kinds of manners!"

As he talked shop with Erica, Godou unhappily looked upwards at the timetable written in Italian.

—The two of them were in the waiting room of the Cagliari train station.

Godou's destination Oliena was located in the province of Nuoro on the eastern part of the island, and was about two or three hours away by rail or by car, so Godou picked the train.

But they have been waiting for close to an hour in that waiting room with no signs of the train.

Italian trains will definitely be late, it was exactly as rumored.

"Look! Did I not warn you, trains do not operate according to schedule? Do as I say, going there by car will be a lot easier."

"You're so annoying! If you don't like being with me, then hurry up and go home!"

Since Godou and Erica were the only two people in the waiting room, they could argue and make a scene as much as they wanted.

As a side note, the Cagliari train station was small yet well-equipped, and was very similar to Japanese stations. This made Godou naturally feel a sense of déjà vu.

"Actually... As you suggested, we could take a long distance bus ."

Even though they weren't getting along, but if the other person was being logical, Godou didn't mind going along with her suggestion.

Perhaps because Godou was too honest and straightforward, Erica easily declined his act of concession.

"What are you talking about?! How can I possibly take public buses or trains?"

"What do you mean?"

Erica proudly puffed her chest at Godou and said:

"Listen well! I, Erica Blandelli, have never taken a train or a bus since the day I was born. Isn't that excessively troublesome? And you need to wait here specifically."

"Uh..."

"I have my own car and driver. Ignoring planes for now, as far as land travel goes, there is completely no reason to do something as troublesome as what we are doing now."

"Uh..."

"Ah... However I do enjoy horse riding a lot, especially that feeling of the breeze, you can't experience that from other places. If only you were as cute as a horse."

"Shut up. Anyway, I understand now."

Godou looked as if he had been enlightened by some truth.

"My greatness? If that's the case, you are too slow, your observation skills need work."

"You're very annoying, that's not what I meant! You are truly a sheltered little high class lady through and through, completely beyond my imagination. And it looks like we have an unbridgeable gap between us!"

This woman existed in a completely different culture. Calling herself a mage, a high class lady who was impossible to placate.

Even without a language barrier, it was likely impossible to understand each other.

"Ah, I didn't grow up that sheltered, though I did receive a noblewoman's education, but the results were less than satisfactory, at most average."

"An ordinary commoner would have nothing to do with the word 'noblewoman'!"

Godou remarked without consideration.

"Then you understand now? There is a serious cultural divide between you and me, and we cannot travel together. Realizing that before we get on the train is really too fortunate—then goodbye to you, though we didn't spend much time together."

"You lack comprehension skills. Traveling with you is completely my decision. No matter what you say, I will not give up."

Erica declared in a very straightforward manner.

"Besides, as a knight, one must endure all odds to complete the mission, overcoming trials and tribulations. This has been the way since ancient times. You don't have to worry about this principle."

"I care about myself, your hardship has nothing to do with me... "

Godou resisted Erica's company from the bottom of his heart.

It was this morning when they met again.

After Godou explained his destination, Erica had made a declaration.

"Then I shall accompany you to Lucretia Zola. I am interested to know what you intend to do after meeting the famed Witch of Sardinia, as well as the power dormant in this stone tablet. Furthermore, that boy could very well contact you, so this is the best course of action."

A very clear expression on her face.

Though Godou vehemently refused, she immediately responded:

"Ah, but if I used my sword, I could instantly rob you of this stone tablet, eh? I didn't do that because I am very gentle and chivalrous. You do understand that, no?"

Thinly veiled threats. Godou couldn't help but acquiesce to Erica tagging along.

And so the two continued to argue as they reached the Cagliari train station.

"You, why do you have to chase that guy? Yes he was quite strange, but not a bad person. Didn't he rescue the people at the harbor yesterday?"

This morning, when Godou conversed with her—

Erica had finished investigating the incident that happened yesterday.

After shaking her off their trail, at the place Godou and the youth went, the group of young men surrounded by fire and debris in the alley of despair were saved by the youth who appeared somehow.

After that, the youth disappeared without a trace like the wind.

In order to prevent Godou from wasting time on the group of young men, Erica told him everything she knew. This morning when she was investigating at the harbor, she had made inquiries with the group of young men about the youth before finally coming over to Godou.

To avoid further delays, Erica hastened Godou to start making his way to his destination.

"You saw the divine beasts yesterday, right? That boy is the prime suspect for summoning them. If it really is the case, then he was simply cleaning up his own messes, and there is nothing to be praised."

"Whether divine beasts or gods or whatever, no matter how matter-of-fact you mention them, I cannot..."

He witnessed everything with his own eyes, but Godou still could not accept them as reality.

"The one appearing at Cagliari was the [Boar], and over the past three days there were three others appearing on the island of Sardinia. The [Camel] at Bosa, the [Ram] at Orgosolo, and the [Bull] at Barumini."

"...Then with the one yesterday it adds up to four."

"Yes. Luckily whenever the divine beasts appeared, a [Wind] deity immediately appears to defeat them, so serious damage was avoided. Great fortune amidst misfortune."

Thinking back to the commotion yesterday, Godou couldn't help but break out in cold sweat.

To have monsters causing destruction everywhere and summing it up as 'serious damage was avoided,' what a terrifying topic of conversation.

"At all these scenes and next to the divine beasts, the boy was sighted on all occasions. Even if he is not the one responsible, he is definitely an important witness. Say, do you still have any objections?"

Watching the self-assured Erica, Godou could only surrender.

There was far too little evidence to defend the youth. With great reluctance, Godou could only agree.

"Let's change the subject, what are gods? I still cannot imagine."

Let's put the youth aside and switch to another topic.

"Well... To be frank, whether or not these are [Gods] in the religious sense, we still cannot say for sure."

Erica watched the sky and Godou also looked up.

Sardinia's sky was blue, deep, and very clear.

On the other end of the sky, was there really a heaven where the gods resided?

"Due to the [Myths] humans have passed along from ancient times, *they* were born. The essence of the earth, sky and stars, natural elements like the system of earth, air, water and fire[16] or the system of metal, wood, water, fire and earth[17], these are what comprise the supernatural core of [Myths], thus lending form to these existence, the [Gods]. That is the hypothesis that we magi have established."

Godou could only understand about half of what Erica said, but felt compelled to nod and agree with the mention of the word ' supernatural.'

Without a doubt, these existences transcended laws of nature.

"However, for [Gods] that make an appearance, a portion of them rebel against the [Myths] that form their core. We have named them [Heretic Gods], gods who resist the myths. They appear in places unrelated to their myths and bring great disaster. Simply by being present, a god's power will cause great detriment to the human world around it."

"...Gods of disaster. I really agree after seeing that black boar."

"Who knows, that could actually be the incarnation of a gentle god. When originally benevolent gods become [Heretic Gods], they also become the source of chaos."

"Then what about the tornado? Was that a god too?"

"Probably, there are many gods possessing the divine qualities of wind, so its identity still hasn't been discerned, probably a god that opposes the [Boar]. But no matter what their attributes, humans are the ultimate victims."

"That's depressing. When gods appear, what can humans do?"

"First of all, option one is to treat it as a natural disaster like storms or earthquakes, and endure it. Do not cause any commotions, but pray for the gods' mercy or willful departure."

"Offering sacrifices, praying to the heavens, that's entirely reliant on the gods."

"Compared to meaningless struggle, it's far more effective. See, the people of Cagliari have not been in uproar over yesterday's incident? That is the current way."

"Yes, I see. So everyone knows about gods appearing?"

Godou thought about this morning's newspaper as well as the reactions at the inn.

Everyone was acting apologetic and seemed very unnatural. So that's the reason.

"Of course, humans who explicitly know about gods are not numerous, but the ancient streets of Europe are pretty much the secluded residences of magi, so people have been taught how to handle these situations. Also, there is tradition, ways of dealing with minor divine appearances have been passed down the ages from ancestors."

"I get it now. Then back to what you were saying, if that's the first option, what's the second?"

"Yes, option two is the simplest. Defeat the god."

Godou got quite a shock from Erica's unexpected answer.

"Can such a thing be done?"

"Of course not!"

Still recovering from the shock, and then to receive such an unreasonable answer. What is this! Playing me for a fool?

"Impossible for ordinary people, and even the best high ranked magi. But on extremely, extremely rare occasions—if one were to receive the grace and good fortune of something like three or four miracles, then it's possible. However, this is not an option worth considering."

"In other words, a lucky coincidence."

"That's not enough, it's completely impossible without a miracle on the level of a carpenter's son born in a manger, and finally becoming the savior of the world. Hence, option three is the most practical. If it's a comparatively weaker deity, just seal it."

Sealing a god, this reminded Godou of his grandfather's words.

Offering the stone tablet at the village where divine retribution was occurring, was how the incident of strange deaths was resolved.

"That is probably a grimoire from mythical times, though it's unknown what power lies dormant within it."

Erica glanced at Godou's backpack which contained the stone tablet.

"You called it a grimoire, but it's clearly not a book?"

"As an ancient product of a time without paper—the age of myths, that was the time when gods could freely walk the earth. During those days, the grimoires created by gods to preserve their wisdom and power all take this form."

Suddenly, an ongoing noise of clackety-clack completely overcame Erica's voice.

With the ear splitting sound of the brakes, the train slowly entered the station.

Godou stood up, having sat in the seat for dozens of minutes, and said:

"Yes, anyway this is a topic an ordinary person like me cannot understand... By the way, my name is Kusanagi Godou."

"Eh, what?"

"My name. You don't care about my name at all? You haven't even asked once, so I will tell you, I'm not going to repeat myself."

Even though he disliked her, if they were to travel together they should know each other's names.

Hence Godou decided to name himself coldly, but Erica's reaction was even more impolite than he expected.

"Hoho, you're called Godot, a name that sounds like someone who fails to show up as agreed, what a strange name."

Samuel Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot."

A story about two vagabonds waiting for a character named Godot who never showed up. Since Godou did not know the content of this play, he had no idea why Erica spoke as she did.

However, he was certain it was nothing good.

Part 2

The outside view seen from the train, was essentially a boundless plain of grassland.

As well as the endless wilderness, flocks of sheep could often be seen on the vast lands along with shepherds. Raising sheep was one of Sardinia's main industries.

Amidst this scenery, one could spot the ancient walled cities—nuraghes. These were the remains of cities built by locals before the arrival of the Phoenicians, and have now become important tourist attractions.

On the way, they made a switch to the train to Nuoro city.

This was the provincial capital of Nuoro, and Oliena was a little town nearby.

They had set off from Cagliari shortly after noon, and arrived at Nuoro city three hours later. After a rough and bumpy bus ride for another few tens of minutes, they finally reached Oliena.

At around six in the evening, it was already dusk.

Godou decided to visit Lucretia Zola's home the next day, because it might not be possible to find her house immediately, and he wanted to find a hotel before it became dark.

"...Hopefully there will be a hotel with vacancies."

Surveying the surroundings, Godou muttered to himself.

Without any outstanding tourist attractions, it was a very ordinary town in the countryside.

Due to the proximity of hills and mountains, it was full of natural scenery, but there was nothing remarkable about the town. Judging from the scenery witnessed along the train ride, this was a typical little Sardinian town.

"It's probably more convenient to get around this island by car. Anyway, I'm so hungry..."

Godou only ate some bread for lunch, so he was now especially hungry.

Hearing Godou utter such words of defeat, Erica couldn't help but laugh beside him.

"What a useless person. Look at me, the first time traveling by rail, and the first time suffering the motion of a bus. Yet I am just as resolute as always? This is the difference in experience between us."

Watching the braggart before him, Godou had nothing to say.

True, the very slender looking Erica had great fortitude. Her beauty and glamor were unaffected, but the cause of this difference had other reasons.

"Of course you're not hungry. While I was tired of the scenery, and enduring boredom and hunger. You went ahead by yourself to chat with others and didn't share any food with me."

Godou recalled the arduous long distance journey today.

While he sat in the box seats, Erica very naturally walked amongst the others.

Originally Godou thought that it would be annoying to carry out a face to face conversation with her, so he didn't pay much attention.

...Watching the window scenery was only interesting for the first hour. As he looked around with nothing to do, he found Erica happily chatting and laughing with a woman in a very nearby seat .

Since it was all in Italian, Godou didn't understand a single word of it.

However, Erica was using a friendly tone of voice completely opposite to how she treated Godou. Even though the content was unknown, one could guess roughly what she was talking about through her fluent tones.

And then soon after, the woman whom Erica was conversing with, opened a basket near her hand, and took out all sorts of food as if by magic—sandwiches, olives, as well as cheese and fruit... Of course, she shared all of them with Erica.

Feeling a little hungry, Godou felt slightly jealous.

All that food, and Erica kept them all to herself.

"As a knight, I have the obligation to maintain my body at its peak condition. The intake of nutrients from food cannot be overlooked. Anyway, it's not my duty to share food with you."

Erica's words were as self-centered as always.

Godou decided to retort in kind, after all, grudges over food can be very horrific.

"Although that's true, despite a knight-like high class lady's pride, you are surprisingly stingy. Yes, you are also very good at currying favor and flattery. To act all friendly just for the sake of food, how should I put it, conniving? I am impressed."

"You... Calling me stingy and conniving? How insulting!"

The malicious retort made Erica's face filled with anger.

Seeing her furious, Godou silently thought to himself, since this works at riling up her anger, perhaps it could come in handy, let me take note of it.

This was a habit Godou developed during his time in baseball.

As the catcher and the fourth hitter, in order to defeat the opponent's trump cards, he needed to analyze the personality and preferences in advance to prepare for matches.

For someone without outstanding natural talent, this sort of effort was necessary.

"Listen well, I will greet the vast majority of people with a smile . Who wants to create enemies unnecessarily? Perhaps one day you might require their assistance!"

"What a calculating fellow you are. I guess you don't really have any close friends you can be open with."

"Please call it elegant diplomacy. It is required to build amicable relations. If you can't even understand that, it means you're just a child."

"I have no wish to understand that kind of thing."

"Hmph, that is why I say you are just a child, unable to understand these things. To dare call me stingy and conniving, unforgivable!"

Erica declared furiously.

She was staring straight at Godou, pointing her finger at him.

"Fine! In order to prove that I, Erica Blandelli, am not a stingy person, even though I have no obligation to share a meal with you, but tonight this lady will grace your dinner with her presence, think of it as compensation for not treating you for lunch!"

And so Godou and Erica entered the doors of a ristorante.

In Italy, there existed common eateries like trattoria[18] as well as high class ristorantes.

Godou knew the distinction, at least.

The one that Erica selected, was without a doubt, in the latter category.

The internal decor was very classic and elegant. With dim lighting and such a high class atmosphere, Godou felt that it would be troubling the ristorante for two minors to enter.

The two were taken to their table, and Erica began to order.

Of course Godou didn't understand a word of Italian and had no idea what they were saying.

"Wait a minute, you're ordering wine!"

Seeing the bottle brought over, Godou was speechless.

Smelling the aroma of the alcohol, it was clearly an appetizer wine—the sparkling kind.

"Isn't that obvious? Eh? Or perhaps you don't know how to drink?"

"How could this be possible?! The restaurant accepted your order."

Godou responded to Erica's provocative smile.

"By the way, the drinking age in Italy and Spain is sixteen."

"Yes, right, I will be sixteen next month, of course there's no problem... Really, getting frantic over such trivial things, you have surprisingly little tolerance."

"Wait a minute, if you're born in April, then you're only fifteen, the same as me. That's illegal!"

"It's fine as long as you're not discovered. Do you really think I'll get caught?"

As the two argued, the food was brought to the table.

For appetizers, there was prosciutto ham as well as a wide selection of fresh seasonal vegetables. With fried lamb brains(!) which Godou had for the first time, handmade sausage, and baked Sardinian flatbread, the choice of food was quite rich and sumptuous.

There were two meat entrées, a local specialty of roasted suckling pig served in slices, as well as horse ribs that still retained some blood.

Everything tasted delicious. Having endured such a long journey, it was well worth it.

However, the problem was the bottle of red wine Erica had ordered.

Due to the dim lighting, the red liquid seemed as if it was giving off a seductive light. When he saw the champagne before the meal, as well as the meat entrées, Godou should have expected it.

"Don't force yourself if you can't drink. For such a trifle bit of wine, I can finish it alone."

Erica's nonchalant tone made Godou feel like he was being mocked as stupid.

If he didn't resist, then he would be an idiot. Understanding that, Godou raised his wine glass. Despite everything, his nature was quite competitive.

He slowly kept the wine in his palate, savoring its flavor.

A complicated taste unique to high quality red wine, with a mixture of bitterness, sweetness as well as a hint of sourness. The fragrance of grape and fruitiness assailed the sense of smell.

"Very good, though I don't particularly like western wine, but this is really good."

"Ah, I didn't think you'd know a little about wine, then you cannot complain. Drink obediently."

Hearing Erica's remark, Godou smiled fearlessly in return.

Despite appearances, I've often been forced to spend nights drinking with my grandfather. At the age of fifteen I already have

substantial knowledge about alcohol... No, the one who taught his middle school grandson the difference between cheap wine and exceptionally good wine, what on earth could he be thinking?

Mother as well, asking her son to mix cocktails for her, sometimes preparing mixtures like whiskey and water, and even making her son taste them.

In order to cater to her own tastes and forcing it upon her son, in some ways, Godou had been receiving an elite education every day of his life.

"Actually, even when drinking with adults, I have never lost in alcohol capacity. How regrettable."

"Ah, what a coincidence, me too. Till now, I have never lost against anyone in drinking."

And then the two of them began to eat and drink heartily.

Whenever anyone's wine glass emptied, the waiter immediately filled the glass quietly.

The one who drank the last glass was Godou.

Since he was not accustomed to red wine, Godou felt relieved after one bottle. He won't have to worry about getting drunk now.

However, watching this take place. Erica frowned.

"Godou... To think you drank one glass more than me, like a sneaky thief."

"You even bothered to count? That's so stingy, please don't do that anymore."

"You... You have insulted me again. Please do not misunderstand. I shall repeat myself once more. I am not stingy at all. The problem is currently the fact that you have imbibed more alcohol than me."

By the way, it's you yourself who wanted to compete.

Though not stingy, but surprisingly childish, Erica's next words shocked Godou:

"Apparently, a second round of competition is necessary. A victor needs to be decided."

—Inhale, exhale.

There were birds chirping outside the room.

Waking up on the bed, Godou vaguely recalled the events yesterday.

After dinner at the ristorante, without any reservations, they were fortunate enough to find a room at a bed and breakfast (B&B) on the roadside.

And then he went with Erica as they bought a large amount of alcohol and snacks to go along.

It would be too unsightly for two youngsters to drink at a bar, so that's what they decided.

Battling on the verge of collapse, spurred by their sense of competitiveness, the two of them downed glass after glass in order to prove their superiority to the other.

And then what happened?

That part of his memory was completely blank. Oh well, best not to think about it.

And then, amidst a feeling of something not being right, Godou could also feel a slight sense of warmth and softness, what could it be? With a very appropriate suppleness, a warm object very comfortable to the touch was lying beside him.

As Godou battled his urge to sleep, he struggled to open his eyes and laid them beside him.

...In that instant, his mind went blank.

Erica Blandelli was sound asleep beside him.

Why on earth was this fellow here?

Could he have committed the same mistake that all men are liable to make?

No, impossible. I think not, probably not. Let's hope for the best from my rationality and Erica's caution, but if something did happen...

As he struggled to calm his panicking heart, Godou took a serious look at Erica at the same time.

Peerless beauty that still caused his heart to race, she now had a calmly sleeping face. Currently she was a beautiful girl who looked just like an angel. Wearing only lingerie, the color was blue, and a two-piece set with a high class design. Other than that, she was wearing nothing else.

Truly a great figure, no, that kind of description was not enough .

As a European female, though she was slender and not very tall , but what was with that extreme voluptuousness? Long slender limbs, tiny face, a figure with proportions like a model, but in spite of all that, a bountiful bosom that looked as if it would overflow from the brassiere, just like ripened fruit such as apples or peaches.

The curve from the waist to the buttocks was also very perfect.

Such artistic beauty, if viewed directly, would seem especially erotic.

Even in swimsuit photo collections, one was hard pressed to find a girl with such a great figure. Right now she was sleeping holding onto Godou's side, and unwittingly resting her spectacular bust against his body.

(—!)

Godou felt extremely unsettled.

The first experience of pleasures of a lifetime lay before him in close proximity, this was bad, totally bad, absolutely bad.

A sense of fullness that made the brain go numb, was rapidly increasing the feeling of criminal immorality.

He had to escape fast! As he made his decision, Erica suddenly woke up.

"...Who is it? Arianna? Come on, how did I get the bed wrong..."

"...Ummm, actually... it's me."

The two of them stared at each other, speechless.

Erica's eyes were originally unfocused but quickly restored the brightness of rationality.

Rubbing her eyes, she got up from the bed, grabbed a shirt and covered her underwear-clad body. Extending her hand, the sword from two days ago appeared in her hand once more.

Without hesitation, Erica's sword pointed straight at Godou's head.

"To dare taint my purity, surely you must die right here!"

"Wah, wait! I haven't done anything strange! Probably..."

As the sword was thrust forward, Godou panicked.

Simply facing her, he felt his spirit suppressed. A sense of despairing oppression came from her body, and her eyes were filled with icy coolness. Was this what they called murderous intent...?

"Right, you probably didn't do anything shameful to me, because you are just as harmless as a castrated dog. Wonderful."

"Yes, that's exactly right. Haha, it really was just a misunderstanding..."

"Yes, to you. If you really had the nerve to do anything funny, even completely asleep, I would have decapitated you. It's your lucky day."

"...Yes that's right."

Erica's cold response, was likely not a lie, and Godou felt relieved in his heart.

"But you have engraved upon your mind the image of my, Erica Blandelli's, body—one that no one is allowed to see. And to have even touched my skin—you still deserve death."

Deserving death for that! Though Godou felt that he should be loudly protesting, but he was so afraid that he couldn't even make a single sound of protest.

Intimate contact with her skin was undeniable, there was no way to refute that.

"Anyway, why don't you calm down first? We can discuss this once you calm down."

"Ah, your sense of recognition is too superficial. I am currently calmly considering whether I should first gouge your eyes out, or decapitate you and parade it on the streets first? Can you not treat me like a fool?"

"How can you call that calm?! Anyway, we should both settle down and discuss peacefully."

After a short ten minutes.

Godou was taxed to his wits persuading Erica to pause her actions, while Erica with her merciless glare, her body wrapped by a single piece of clothing, the two of them stared face to face once again.

"First of all, let us confirm how this situation arose and where responsibility lies. No matter what, it is our fault that we drank too much last night. For that we have to reflect."

Not only was the stomach feeling unpleasant, the throat was also very parched.

These were common symptoms the next day after heavy drinking, and Godou was now feeling uncomfortable.

Even so, he felt impressed that he wasn't hungover. Like his grandfather and mother, perhaps this was the Kusanagi pedigree, a bunch of people with extremely strong liver functions, all grand drinkers.

Looking closely, Erica was not hungover either.

It made sense, if either of them couldn't hold their liquor, then they wouldn't have binged so much.

Compared to drinking alone, or a large group gathered together for a banquet, drinking only goes completely out of hand when it was two people. Godou understood the nuances of that.

If another activity required him to drink like a bull again, Godou would not want to repeat this experience again.

"To think that someone of the same generation could match me in alcohol intake. If it was Lily, she'd get drunk in a short while, and then I'd have some good fun with her..."

Probably extremely confident in her alcohol capacity, Erica murmured to herself softly.

"Anyway, drinking too much is both our fault, not sending you off earlier is my fault, but spare me the eye-gouging and decapitation. Is there a more peaceful way to appease your anger?"

Godou apologized in a Japanese way, bowing his head in penance.

An option existed before it became late at night, to send Erica away since this room was rented by Godou. Which is why he was reflecting, why he didn't do that?

"Do you think such an apology can let you off for my humiliation?"

Erica stared with icy cold eyes.

There was a merciless murderous intent, making Godou break out in cold sweat. However, some words still had to be said. Taking a deep breath, he tried to argue:

"Say, can you just treat this as having slept with a pet? Do you have to be so concerned?"

"Of course! To have shared a bed with a male other than a marriage partner, this is an embarrassment that can never be wiped away!"

A completely different upbringing compared to his own, Godou was deeply reminded once again.

Towards Erica's complaints, Godou thought once more.

However, he couldn't think of anything—no solution. At this time, there was nothing to be done but push the problem aside for now.

"OK, I get it. Bickering here over this incident won't get anywhere, so why don't we leave first, since we must find Lucretia-san's house. That is our goal, right?"

Godou didn't dare say any more as he waited for Erica's response.

Though extremely furious, she had quick wits and should instantly recall the original goal—that was what Godou hoped in his heart.

"...Correct. As a knight, the current priority is to finish my mission first."

Erica spoke softly.

Appearing calm once more, she nodded, expressionless like a Japanese mask, though this actually looked even more horrifying than her loud tantrum. Her current state of resolve was actually more terrifying.

"So, let's hurry to the Witch of Sardinia—after that, I will make you truly regret your crimes. I will find a suitably harsh punishment for a sex maniac like you."

To be called a sex maniac! Godou wanted to sigh at the heavens.

And so the turbulent journey of the two, continued on its second day.

Part 3

Beneath the cloudless sky, Oliena was a beautiful and scenic little town.

Nearby were refreshing green woods as well as beautiful springs. For a town with less than ten thousand in population, its facilities were very well equipped.

"If it's such a small town, then Lucretia-san's home shouldn't be that tough to find... It's only the fact that I haven't contacted her beforehand, that worries me—"

Godou spread out the map of the small town, and began searching near the home his grandfather had described.

They were currently at a cafe near the place they spent the night .

Godou muttered to himself as he ate breakfast. Though Erica was beside him, they haven't exchanged a single word after the incident that morning. Having finished breakfast, it was finally the time to search for their destination.

Godou asked for directions from passersby.

Using clumsy English to tell them where he was going, and then taking out the map to inquire how to get there.

Due to the language barrier, there was no way to convey small details.

Even so, the approximate direction could be gleaned, and then they set off. If they got lost, the same method was repeated with other passersby.

Having repeated it four times, it was now the fifth—

"Ah, come on, this is exasperating! Give me the map, I'll show you the way."

Silent until now, Erica finally erupted.

"What, took you long enough. It's not like I have to accept your help."

Godou replied coldly.

Yes, it was partially his fault for making Erica angrily silent from this morning till now, but was it really necessary to be so offended!

"I am not helping you, I just want to meet Lucretia Zola faster! What on earth are you doing, the passersby already explained in so much detail, yet you are still clueless!"

"I can't help it! I don't know any Italian!"

The people who Godou asked had explained in particular detail .

However, Godou completely didn't understand Italian. Even when he wanted to communicate seriously in English, his verbal

ability was rather lacking, so he was unable to understand the details. This was why they were progressing in such an inefficient manner.

Erica grabbed the map and first led them forward.

Apparently, she remembered all the routes explained so far, and was able to walk towards their destination with no hesitation at all. Despite his great anger, Godou had no choice but to follow her.

From then on, everything went smoothly and they arrived at their destination twenty minutes later.

Lucretia Zola's home was located near a forest on the edges of town.

A stone house in the middle of the garden gave off a very ancient atmosphere. From the overall feeling of the house, combined with the absence of nearby houses, it felt very solitary.

The witch's residence. Though it was a small house, its appearance matched this name particularly well.

Glancing over the garden, it was full of weeds everywhere. The owner either had no interest in gardening, or was too lazy to care.

Anyway, the whole point of coming all the way to Sardinia was to reach this place.

Godou stepped in front of Erica, walking over to the entrance and pressed the button to the doorbell.

—After waiting for a while, there was still no response.

"Not here... If that's the case, let's wait until she returns—hmm?"

Godou suddenly stared with his eyes wide open.

With a scratching heavy sound, the door opened automatically.

Carefully scrutinizing the surroundings, there was no one before or behind the door, and the old wooden door did not seem like it was automated. What happened?

"Probably this means please enter. You've already arrived at a witch's home, don't be taken aback from this kind of simple trick."

"Damn it, this is magic too. What a suspicious house..."

Lectured by Erica from behind, Godou muttered to himself.

Stepping into the house with apprehension, Godou found a black cat waiting for him at the entrance.

Meow~~ It was calling out with indifferent tones.

For such a slender and elegant body with soft sleek fur, the cat didn't look cute at all.

The black cat suddenly walked into the depths of the house. On the way it stopped and waved its paw, going 'meow' as if calling someone, then continued on its way.

"It's really telling us to follow?"

"Of course, this is a cat familiar—even for you, something so classic can be understood, right?"

Of course Godou realized it already, but he just didn't want to accept it.

Godou shook his head, casting the cultural shock aside. To falter at this point would be a waste of time, so it's best to catch up to the cat.

They were taken to what appeared to be a bedroom.

It was medicine—no, full of the aroma of herbs. The room was very disorganized, and reclining on the bed was a woman who only half sat up.

The cat just now was huddled in a corner, yawning in a bored manner.

"Welcome to my home, my old friend's relative. Whose relative are you? I can see from one glance, you must be Kusanagi Ichirou's grandson. I am Lucretia Zola."

Suddenly, the woman on the bed was speaking in perfect Japanese.

Godou was so surprised he jumped backwards.

Before his eyes was a beautiful woman in her underwear, greeting her guests while reclined on her bed. Her glazed over

eyes gave off an incredible sense of charm, while her flaxen colored hair was also extremely beautiful.

A beautiful woman at her prime, her apparent age was in the latter half of the twenties.

Even if she dressed young on purpose, she was thirty at most, which completely didn't fit calculations. If so much happened between her and grandfather, she should now be an old lady, advanced in age.

"Ah young man, have you been entranced by me? Is there a problem? Hohoho, perhaps this appearance might be too stimulating for the young ones. Something troublesome happened lately, so I've been unable to get up from bed... Besides, you must be very happy inside? Men are always like that."

"Sorry to interrupt. You are Lucretia Zola-san?"

She nodded to confirm Godou's question.

"Ah, yes. You are Kusanagi Godou, right? Ichirou already sent me a letter explaining everything and letting his grandson to come in his place, so I've been waiting for you."

—!?

Godou suddenly let out a horrific scream.

Gods, magi, the occurrences these three days have brought Godou's common sense to the brink of collapse. Struck with the final blow, his mind finally halted.

"You've already gotten this far, what is there to be surprised about? Maintaining a youthful body is a privilege unique to witches whose magic has reached the highest levels. Compared to that, I consider [Heretic Gods] far more shocking."

"Oh, to have met the gods appearing on this island, what an unfortunate youth. By the way, girl, who are you? You don't look Japanese."

"Erica Blandelli. Great Knight of the Copper Black Cross. Due to various reasons, I am currently travelling with him."

"Sir Paolo's niece eh, I've heard rumors. So it looks like you've come to this countryside because of that [Heretic God], what strong initiative."

By the time he noticed, Erica and Lucretia had begun a conversation between women.

Finally calm, Godou took out the stone tablet from his bag.

"Anyway, this thing... was originally what my grandfather intended to bring over—the object that Lucretia-san left in Japan. Please accept it."

The stone tablet depicting the childishly drawn chained man.

Giving it a glance, Lucretia said:

"...[Secret Tome of Prometheus], as expected. A long time ago, I found it in the depths of the Caucasus mountains, how nostalgic."

"Signora, may I ask a few questions?"

In Italian, 'Signora' was equivalent to addressing someone as ' Madam.'

Lucretia smiled at Erica who was trying to explain her intentions in a cautious manner.

"It's fine even if you call me by name. As you can see, it won't be appropriate to treat a young beauty like me as an old lady. So, Sir Erica, why are you following this youth from Japan?"

The two witches gazed at each other.

Beside them, Godou felt uncomfortable as an ordinary person.

"Then Lucretia, you can just call me Erica. Actually someone related to the [Heretic God] appearing this time has been in contact with Godou. Furthermore, he was even carrying a grimoire from the mythical age, so he might be involved in this incident. I was suspicious whether he had ill intentions in coming to see you."

Erica threw Godou a glance as if she had seen something insignificant.

"After spending some time with him, he was clearly a guy who knew nothing, lacked manners, failed in comprehension, and is very shameless."

"Is that so, I can't really see that, from appearance he just looks like a harmless youth."

Lucretia gave her own opinion which ran contrary to Erica's malicious commentary.

Godou objected by saying 'Do not make such baseless judgments!' from the side, but Erica ignored him completely, continuing:

"So it's true that he is the grandson of your friend—which means that Godou really came to Sardinia by chance, and came to possess the grimoire by chance as well?"

"Basically, his grandfather is a scholar, an ordinary person completely removed from the world of magic and gods."

Hearing Lucretia's words, Erica's shoulders sank in disappointment.

"How could this be, to have wasted so much precious time on an insignificant commoner, how embarrassing. For me to have done such a thing!"

"...Let me clarify beforehand, I did not tell you a single lie!"

Before he gets blamed, Godou wanted to emphasize the fact to Erica.

And then, Lucretia smiled as she spoke.

"You don't have to be that dispirited, Miss Erica, if you wanted information about the [Heretic God], then coming here was the right place. As a reward for your efforts getting here, I will tell you ."

"—Lucretia, could it be that you know which god it is this time? "

"To be precise, I am not sure. My information has only confirmed that it is some war god. Originally I thought it was a deity like Melqart, but then it turns out to be a little more than that. "

Lucretia smiled faintly on the bed.

Melqart. Hearing the name of that god for the first time, Godou's mind was full of questions.

"Oh, you don't know, young man? It can't be helped, though a deity with historical significance, he is no longer famous in modern times. No, to be precise, that should be the true name."

Lucretia continued her explanation smoothly:

"The divine king worshiped by Semitic tribes such as the Canaanites and Phoenicians... Baal. Originally the god of storms, lightning and the sky, his power continued to grow until he finally possessed many authorities. Amongst the Indo-European languages, Zeus and Odin are the most similar. You've heard of those two, right?"

"Yes, that I know."

The Greek chief deity Zeus, as well as the Norse chief deity Odin who often appeared in operas.

Even for Japanese people like Godou, there were few who haven't heard of their names.

"These kinds of sky gods, basically all possess many different characteristics. Top god, king, god of wisdom, god of life, god of war, god of the underworld, etc. Baal is also one of these archetypes. With many faces comes aliases. This is very natural, right? ...Melqart was the title honored by the people when he protected the city of Tyre."

It sounded like a name he had heard before.

Godou prided himself on studying history seriously. Lucretia smiled faintly.

"Tyre was the city built by the Phoenicians. Its defenses were so great that it took Alexander the Great a year to conquer it. It was also the naval headquarters of the Phoenicians, masters of the ancient seas. Reaching Sardinia, they became the rulers of this island."

Thus, Melqart was a god with deep ties to the island of Sardinia.

Having said that, Lucretia made further additions.

"Around Greece, Melqart was depicted as a giant man wielding clubs—a few days ago, I witnessed the god Melqart appearing as such a figure."

"But Lucretia, didn't you begin by saying this was unrelated to Melqart?"

The elderly witch responded to Erica's interruption, unaffected.

"Yes, aren't there column-like stone formations in Sicily? Five days ago, my spirit vision indicated an anomalous gathering of divine power there. To observe the situation, I personally went there."

Spirit vision—was it something like clairvoyance?

Hearing these words, Godou could no longer deny she was a witch.

"Over there, what I saw was the sight of two gods fighting. One was Melqart, the other took the form of a warrior, wielding a golden sword. The result of the fierce battle between two gods was mutual injury and defeat."

Lucretia sighed.

As if very tired, Godou worried about her condition and came closer to her bed.

"Don't worry, young man. The conversation is about to end—Melqart with his club and the other god with the golden sword, they struck each other on the final blow, causing heavy injuries to both sides. Melqart transformed into lightning and flew away, while the god of the golden sword was shattered."

"Shattered? So he lost form?"

"No, the body of the sword god was divided into pieces, and each piece took on a new form. One was a boar, the other a hawk, as well as creatures such as a horse or a goat. These avatars immediately flew across the ocean or into the sky."

In other words, the massive beasts appearing all over the island, were born from the fragments of the god with the golden sword.

Godou felt things were getting more and more ridiculous.

"Then the [Wind] god that defeated the wild beast, was that Melqart's incarnation?"

"Who knows, whether Melqart or the sword god, neither could have recovered in such short time. If they recovered, my spirit vision should have received premonitions, but so far there has been none. It is also possible that they have left Sardinia."

Towards Erica's question, Lucretia only answered "who knows? " and shrugged.

Though Godou didn't know anything, he could tell that the situation was very unusual.

"Does that mean you were caught in the battle between gods, and exhausted your magical power?"

"Yes. In order to protect myself on that battlefield, it was necessary to use magic that exceeded my limits. Thanks to that, my

magic has been completely exhausted, and would probably take three months to recover. No major spells for the meantime, or even moving my body. How troublesome."

Though she clearly said troublesome, her tone of voice was rather leisurely.

Godou suddenly thought of the stone tablet held in his hand all this time.

"Then once again, I hand this over to you. Please accept it. Didn't Lucretia-san use this to suppress a god before? Perhaps it might be useful this time."

"...Wait a minute, Godou. How could you have withheld such an important detail from me?"

"This is something belonging to Lucretia-san, what reason do I have to reveal everything to you?"

Ignoring the frowning Erica, Godou extended the stone tablet forward.

"Hmm..." Deep in thought, Lucretia looked at the young man and woman. What was she thinking?

"Young man, what I did with the [Secret Tome of Prometheus], you have already heard from Ichirou?"

"Yes, though... I still don't quite believe it."

"Miss Erica, did you come here for the purpose of sealing the [Heretic God]?"

"That's right, I have to overcome this challenge, in order to prove that I can become the foremost talent of the Copper Black Cross. For that, I have accepted this difficult mission."

"Which is why you are interested in the whereabouts of gods, how troublesome!"

Lucretia was complaining in a frivolous tone of voice, furthermore—

"I know. Young man, I entrust this to you, use it carefully."

She spoke to Godou.

"Ah!" Godou was greatly shocked, and Erica likewise.

"Lucretia Zola! What are you thinking! To give a precious grimoire from the mythical age to this clueless idiot, there must be limits to stupid decisions!"

"Having that said, it is actually quite troublesome for this thing to be brought here now—or rather, it is useless in my current state. You can see how my body is now. Who could have expected it to return to my side at such a time, sometimes the will of fate is rather ironic."

"Then you should give the grimoire to me instead! That's called using the right person for the right job!"

"But that's too reasonable, totally uninteresting. I prefer the fun choice."

"Please don't joke around in such depressing tones!"

Though this unexpected development shocked Godou, he decided to interrupt.

Taking a casual glance at the bed she was lying on—he noticed, beside the pillow was an old video game console with a game cartridge inserted on top.

_____ Quest? Was it that RPG? Must have been a very old fantasy RPG?

"Wait a minute, you want to refuse? Let me first state that I am not influenced by that game I've been playing, to have made that proposal. Still, for a Level One young man to set off for adventure to complete the mission, it really is a staple of the adventure genre. Doesn't that make your blood hot and boiling?"

"Not hot blooded at all, I am completely unmotivated!"

Ignoring Godou's objection, Lucretia continued:

"By the way, of course as a Great Knight of the Copper Black Cross—Paolo Blandelli's niece and apprentice, you won't attempt to rob this ordinary youth of this grimoire by force, right?"

"How could I do such a thing?! Don't look down on me!"

"Good. Miss Erica, only those who overcome great hardship can be called knights. If you want others to witness your magnanimity, do not complain about this level of hindrance—as for you, young man!"

"Yes?"

"Just as you heard, I look forward to your performance. How this grimoire should be used, everything will be left to your hands. Help the girl, run away, use it in a way I cannot imagine. Show me some fun."

Lucretia finished, and added one more sentence.

"Also, I entrust you with this girl, please take good care of her."

"Take care of me? What a joke! For someone like that to take care of me, please don't treat me like a fool!"

Angrily finishing these words, Erica made her way to the entrance with elegant yet crude footsteps.

Looking extremely furious, she walked out directly.

What should he do?

As Godou puzzled, Lucretia waved her hand as if ushering him out.

Looks like the meeting was over. Troubled, Godou shook his head and walked outside to catch up with the blonde beauty.

Chapter 4 - Secret Tome of Prometheus

Part 1

Having bid Lucretia goodbye, Godou and Erica were silent as they walked out the door.

What should be done next?

Just as Godou sighed lightly, a lively ringtone was heard from Erica's cellphone. Immediately taking out a red cellphone from her pocket, Erica answered in Italian.

Godou watched her from the side.

Erica's expression and tone of voice were very serious. Could there be an emergency?

She hung up after about five minutes, and suddenly glared at Godou.

"Godou, didn't you say this morning? About this morning's embarrassment, you will make amends even if it means ritual suicide by seppuku?[19] Were you lying to me?"

"Of course I was lying, who would want to commit seppuku for that!"

"Hmph, then I'll regard it as just an expression—listen well, you have to come along."

"Ah? Why?"

Godou questioned, seeing Erica giving him orders in a matter-of-fact manner. In the next instant, her gaze aimed at Godou carried the same derision as if watching a fool.

"Though you yourself are a useless amateur, but that grimoire—the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] is different. Though Lucretia did not tell us its functions, there is no harm in bringing it along."

That's right, the power of the grimoire was not revealed to us after all.

When we asked the original owner, the only answer we got was something like 'Shouldn't you find out the hidden powers of an item yourself? Asking about it would be just as tasteless as reading a strategy guide for an RPG.'

Recalling Lucretia's levity in attitude, Godou couldn't help but feel depressed.

Or perhaps, it was a decision taken under careful consideration?

"So, why don't you carry my luggage for now? Serve me as a sign of your sincerity to make amends. Do you understand?"

"...You're not going to point a sword at me, then rob it?"

"As a Great Knight of the Copper Black Cross, I have sworn not to do such a despicable thing! If such an oath were to be broken, I would be a laughingstock!"

Erica spoke with great emotion. To think that oath sworn would have such important significance.

So, what should Kusanagi Godou do? Obediently tag along with Erica, or escape? Or simply stuff that whatever grimoire into her hands and go directly back to Japan?

Godou picked the fourth option.

"I'm going back to see Lucretia-san, please wait a bit for me!"

Without waiting for Erica's response, he turned around and went back to the witch's home.

This time he opened the door by his own hands, and entered Lucretia's room.

"How disappointing, young man. Intruding into a woman's bedroom uninvited. Complete failure. Quickly close the door, and calm down."

Lucretia Zola was lying on the bed, gazing at Godou with eyes which were about to fall asleep.

Wrapped under the blankets, this time she did not raise her body to speak.

She really was very tired. To watch a battle between gods in proximity, and survive—probably a task more difficult than Godou could imagine.

"Having said goodbye ten minutes ago, and then returning so soon. Could your heart be stolen by my beauty, and you came back for a love confession? Oh well, can't blame you. When a boy in puberty meets a beauty like me, such passionate behavior cannot be helped."

"No, that's completely wrong."

Godou replied swiftly, he won't let her control the flow of the conversation.

Due to the extremely broad range of friends of the sociable grandfather and mother, Godou was well accustomed to dealing with this type of strange person.

"You clearly look so similar to your grandfather, but I don't see any verbal gift in pleasing women. Still, I'm quite interested in you . What do you wish to speak with me?"

Lucretia finally opened her eyes.

As if scrutinizing Godou's face, she stared straight at him.

"Weren't Lucretia-san's words just now a bit too strange? Like Erica said, giving her the stone tablet would definitely be better than the current situation."

"Hohoho, but I also said, I picked the more interesting choice."

"That was absolutely not a lie, I understand. But I feel that—it's not entirely your true intentions, otherwise I wouldn't get the feeling I was playing along."

"Hey, so you think I have other motives, young man."

Hearing Godou's words, Lucretia giggled with laughter.

"Yes, before I get tired of the whole incident and dump this stone tablet in the trash can, please tell me the truth. That would be a great help."

"Threatening me instead! Excellent, that's more like Ichirou's grandson. Stubborn like him, but in a completely different way. You can't be underestimated. Yes, otherwise, there would have been no point in handing things to you."

Lucretia looked very happy and was laughing on the bed.

"Fine, I will explain directly. It's actually nothing important, but I just want you to act as that little lady's restraint. Take her down a notch. If you give the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] to her directly, she will immediately take it for duels against gods, that genius!"

"...She is someone that amazing?"

"Yes, Erica Blandelli is said to be the treasured prodigy of the Copper Black Cross, but that's not the dangerous part. The danger lies in the fact that she has yet to understand the terror of [Heretic Gods]... In fact, I did consider the option of retrieving the grimoire and hiding it."

"Then why not do that?"

"Because that thing will definitely come in handy. So, I wish to hand it over to some mage. And then when Sir Salvatore arrives, pass it over and let him use it effectively—that was one of the plans I conceived."

"Sir Salvatore?"

Another character addressed with title "Sir", Godou tilted his head in puzzlement.

Was he a famous person knighted over in Britain?

"Yes, that's right. Perhaps he is the one who can resolve this incident in one fell swoop. A great and important man who is impossible for an unaffiliated mage like me to approach, so it's better to hand the grimoire over to Erica-san who is from a prestigious family. Can you accept it now?"

"Got it, yes... In other words, you hope I can be a hindrance to Erica?"

"Correct answer! So young man, what do you plan to do?"

Realizing the intentions of this elderly witch, Godou began to ponder.

Knowing Lucretia's intentions now, should he follow her wishes?

What should he do? He was truly displeased with the witch's intentions, but this island has been met with a situation beyond

human knowledge, and people's peaceful lives were being disrupted.

He didn't think he could resolve the issue himself, but he can't stay out of it and do nothing.

Godou sighed, if he didn't see this through to the very end, he wouldn't be able to return to Japan with a peace of mind.

"I know, as long as there is no danger to my life, I will follow and act with that fellow."

"Yes, that would be a very great help. Let me toast to you another day in recognition of your courage and meddlesome ways. "

"Don't call me meddlesome! It could very well turn out to be life threatening!"

He had witnessed divine power at Cagliari.

Godou was not so naive that he would believe himself to be safe , having witnessed that scene. In front of that kind of threat, humans were as insignificant as grains of sand.

"Hohoho, don't be angry. For you to successfully reach here in a country with a language barrier, that indicates luck is on your side. If it gets dangerous, run away, I won't blame you. I pray that good fortune be with you."

Finally, Lucretia smiled peacefully as she gazed at Godou's face.

Like an old lady watching a grandson, or an older sister blessing a brother on his journey of growth. It was an ambiguous expression.

Part 2

"What, Godou. You've finally finished your secret talks with that woman? ...How shameless."

Seeing Godou step out of Lucretia's home once again, Erica murmured to herself.

"Who are you calling shameless?! I just have some things to confirm with that person."

"Shameless enough to do something behind my back. If it's nothing shameful, then you would have done it openly? Fine, whatever. Hurry up and go, the next destination is Dorgali."

"Why are we going there? Have you found news of that guy?"

Erica had indicated their next destination was an hour away by car as Godou questioned her.

It would be great if the youth he last saw in Cagliari was safe and sound.

"No, but his chances of appearing are quite high... Our spirit vision users at the Copper Black Cross have discerned the gathering of magical power in the area around Dorgali."

"Magical power?"

"Correct, and very powerful. The reason why I went to Cagliari, was also because spirit vision found a similar concentration of magic there, and then the boy and the [Boar] appeared."

Come to think of it, Lucretia also mentioned spirit vision.

Spirit vision users had talent like prophets, and the phone call just now, was apparently a report from them.

"To predict something like this, how amazing, can they see everything?"

"It's not like that. The content of their spirit vision is very limited, like now, we still have no idea of the identity of the deity on this island—however, it would be different if a spirit vision user of the highest level were here. Unfortunately, people possessing that kind of talent are exceedingly rare."

A spirit vision user's powers were predominantly determined by inborn disposition.

Come to think of it, if people with clairvoyance were common, it would actually be quite horrible.

Accepting that, Godou changed his mood. Hearing that the youth might appear, he suddenly began to feel anxious and wanted to know as quickly as possible whether he was safe.

"How are we going to get there? Train or bus, which one?"

"Neither, get a car and driver!"

Still, to expect a taxi cab in this town in the countryside—

In the end, compared to calling for a cab from a taxi company in Nuoro, it would be faster to take a bus directly. Having concluded that, Godou and the unhappy Erica got on the bus.

Dorgali was a little town on the coast.

It had valleys near the sea, as well as steep river valleys around it. Erica had mentioned that Dorgali was surrounded by abundant natural resources, and has been designated as a national park.

Along the bumpy undulating mountain road, the bus quickly sped.

"—Hmm? It's raining?"

Watching outside the window, Godou suddenly found the sky darken.

Soon grey clouds appeared and covered the sky like a heavy curtain.

"Raining? No, that's not it."

Hearing Godou mutter to himself, Erica turned back to face him . (By the way, even though the seat beside Godou was vacant, she ignored it and took the seat in front.)

"It almost never rains in Sardinia this time of the year, you didn't even know that?"

A Mediterranean climate. Warm, dry, very little rainfall. This island, in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, obviously belonged to that climate region as well.

"Then, could it be..."

"Exactly as you imagine. Perhaps some strange incident will happen—most likely the omen of divine presence."

A few minutes after Erica's prophesy, the short bus trip ended.

Dorgali was a very small town at the foot of a mountain.

There were only a few shops and a police station along the main road where the bus stop was simply marked by a sign. Getting off, the first things Godou and Erica noticed were the dark clouds in the sky. Compared to what they saw on the bus, the clouds were clearly more numerous.

Making the cloudless clear sky an hour ago seem like an illusion , the first overcast skies Godou saw in Sardinia was giving him a great ominous feeling.

"—It's here."

Erica suddenly spoke.

And then, rain drops began pelting Godou's face. It finally began to rain.

Heavy rain like a sudden shower, but this was probably not what Erica was referring to.

Just as Godou thought that, a golden light suddenly flashed.

Crash!

As the sound of thunder roared, lightning struck, and the wind began to pick up rapidly.

—A storm.

Without any warning signs, the storm arrived just like that. And then Godou noticed something.

Casually flying amidst the storm was a four-legged giant beast—a [Goat] in the middle of the sky.

Like a Chinese dragon hovering in the air, a giant [Goat] with neither feathers nor wings, leading the wind, clouds and rain, dancing with the thunder in the sky.

Since it was very far away, its precise size could not be determined.

Still, it couldn't be smaller than the [Boar] sighted in Cagliari. Its furry hide was white, and there were two long horns extending from its head.

Roar!

The [Goat] roared loud and sonorously, and blew a sudden gust of strong wind.

Calling out again, this time it was thunder and lightning descending upon the ground.

This town was virtually all built with wood, but since it was raining, it was fortunate that one did not need to worry about a fire hazard.

Even so, it did not change the fact that there was a disaster. With lifeless eyes, Godou watched the heroic form of the [Goat].

"Is that also an incarnation born from the sword god?"

"Probably, if possible I really want to use the [Secret Tome of Prometheus]'s ability to stop it, and then make direct contact, but it can't be done."

The feeling he got from Erica suddenly changed, and Godou was very surprised.

A feeling of splendor like fire and gold, an extremely brave and intense will exuded from her beauty and her eyes.

It was a majestic and unapproachable figure, like a top class participant just before a competition began.

"Come, my sword, Cuore di Leone. Blade that guards the throne of the lion! I beseech the predecessors of red and black. Grant your protection to my body and my chivalry!"

And then Erica began chanting the words like a spell.

Immediately following, the slightly familiar slender sword and a red cape, never seen before, appeared out of the air. Wielding the sword in her right hand, Erica majestically wrapped the cape around herself with her left.

The cape had a bold design with black stripes on a red background, and particularly suited Erica's beauty and blonde hair . In an instant, Godou felt deeply attracted.

"I will approach that [Goat] to investigate. Godou you should find a place to hide. We will meet up later."

"You plan on fighting against that thing?"

"Of course not! I am just investigating. No matter where you are , I can find you with magic. Be my guest, find a place to hide!"

Leaving those words behind, Erica rushed forth.

Speeding like an arrow through the raining streets as if she was flying, this speed was completely beyond human limits.

Could this also be magic? As Godou reacted in surprise, he watched as she receded in the distance.

"...This is not a leisurely situation, I'd better find a place to hide quickly."

Checking out the situation in the streets, Godou was shocked.

The sudden storm and thunder.

And then, the giant monster flying in the air.

With so many massive anomalies, Dorgali finally began to have a commotion.

There were those who opened their windows to check out the storm conditions, only to be shocked by the scene in the air.

Cries of terror, screams of surprise, chaotic disturbances, the public was wailing as if fallen into hell.

The storm blew timber and light objects like cloth into the sky. Lightning periodically lit up the darkness of the overcast skies, while thunder descending from the heavens torched the earth and demolished buildings.

Who could have thought such a massive uproar could happen in a little town of several thousand in population.

"—Running away recklessly would be even worse, what should I do?"

Seeing the chaos in the town, Godou couldn't help muttering to himself.

Since Godou already knew part of the reasons why this was happening, he was able to maintain his natural calm. Watching the people in chaos—he was able to notice.

Like himself, there was another youth calmly observing the panicking crowd.

A handsome youth so outstanding that one could never forget his face having seen him once.

The two exchanged glances.

One smiled nostalgically, while the other showed a troubled expression.

Godou had wanted to see him, wanted all along to confirm if he was safe.

However, faced with this sudden encounter, he had a feeling of doubt. Whenever the god's incarnations appeared, the youth was also witnessed. Wasn't this just as Erica had described?

Part 3

Running.

Erica Blandelli was using the [Leap] technique to make her body lighter as she ran at full strength.

Running towards the numerous buildings that were struck by lightning, all sorts of objects that were blown away by the violent

wind, and the heavily damaged little town corroded by the rare rainstorm.

In fact, Erica was so fast she might as well be flying.

The stone paved streets were breaking apart, and she leapt between roofs, streetlights, and all sorts of footholds on buildings, her feet rarely if ever touching the ground.

It was difficult to build high rise buildings in Europe, particularly Italy.

Since there were many cities possessing iconic sights like the Tower of Pisa or the Coliseum, in order not to affect the scenery, there were many legal regulations preventing the construction of high rise buildings.

Erica thought it was a shame.

—If there was a taller building, she could get a lot closer to the [Goat].

Dorgali's buildings were five or six stories max, while the [Goat] was flying leisurely a couple tens of meters above in the sky.

Though Erica was called a genius in magic, she did not know the techniques of flying.

Her specialty was [Iron], the ability to manipulate iron and steel like her own arms and legs for the purposes of offense and defense . Flying, spirit vision and the preparation of potions belonged to the domain of true witches like Lucretia Zola.

Finally reaching the top of some tower, Erica took a deep breath as she halted her steps.

Even though her goal was investigation, watching from such a far distance was not very useful.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained—

She needed to take a gamble now. Though she had never used it in real combat, that spell—the secret technique mentioned in the report to her uncle, it was time to try it out.

Agonizing for about ten seconds, she immediately made her decision.

She will first make the venture, then decide when to advance or to retreat as the situation dictates.

"Eli Eli lama sabachthani? Oh Lord, why hast thou forsaken me? "[20]

Erica chanted in a loud voice.

The Golgotha spell words were an incantation of fury and prayer, calling forth hate and regret.

"O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel."[21]

Pointing Cuore di Leone towards the sky with her right hand.

This sword was paired with Il Maestro, the magic sword of her rival Liliana Kranjcar.

In the past, these were two precious swords forged for the sake of two great knights bearing the titles of the Lion King and the Fairy King. Erica and Liliana had discovered the two swords in the catacombs beneath Florence, and each claimed one of the pair as their personal weapon.

"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet."[22]

This was the disastrous song of despair, carrying anger at the Lord who withheld salvation even at the verge of death.

"But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of wild oxen!"[23]

This was a hymn of prayer, containing the absolute will pledging allegiance to the Lord in the face of certain death.

"I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee."[24]

The name of the spell was [Oh Lord! Why hast thou forsaken me?]

Of all the techniques passed down by the Copper Black Cross, recognized as one of the most difficult of the secret arts.

—Feeling the chill of the icy cold air, Erica knew she had succeeded.

From her lips came the proud smile of a lioness.

Clearly not the result of the storm, the surrounding temperature was gradually falling.

Erica's spell words, has summoned bone-chilling cold.

The hill of Golgotha, the same air as the place where the Son of God perished, this same freezing air was now filling Erica's surroundings. Simply bathed in this cold air would cause an ordinary person's heart to go numb.

Then for a god—or a similar divine existence, of course it would still be extremely uncomfortable.

And so the [Goat] lowered its gaze.

It slowly descended towards Erica's location.

Provocation successful, Erica smiled as she leapt to a neighboring rooftop.

She began to observe the [Goat].

Extremely intelligent eyes. Goats were fundamentally very smart animals, though they resembled stupid sheep in appearance, they were exceptionally alert and clever. So this was only natural.

When she met the [Boar] at Cagliari, the [Wind] god had appeared before she had a chance to get near like this.

Though she saw the battle between the black boar and the tornado from afar, she could not get close to observe. However, at this close range she could now see that the [Goat] did not have intelligence like a divine beast.

Probably only animal intelligence—that was the likely level.

—Let's test it.

"Cuore di Leone, I grant to you the weeping cries of the son of God and the Holy Spirit, become the spear of Longinus!"

Using the magic of [Transformation] on her beloved sword, she changed its form to a spear.

Infusing it with the spell words or despair, this gave Cuore di Leone the same magical power as the holy spear that pierced the son of God. Thus a magical weapon was born, capable of harming gods and making them bleed.

"Saint Thomas, share your martyrdom with others!"

Accompanying the new spell words, Erica threw the spear forward.

Granted the curse of never missing its target, even a god could not escape the thrown spear, let alone existences beneath gods—like divine or sacred beasts.

The spear left a deep open wound on the lower abdomen of the [Goat].

Roar! The giant beast's painful cries reached up into the heavens .

Erica recalled Cuore di Leone using magic, having confirmed her hunch, that the divine beast born from the [Heretic God]—an opponent of that level can be handled with her power alone!

However, her opponent was not so weak as to allow an easy victory without preparation.

As Erica analyzed the battle potential of her enemy, the [Goat] roared noisily.

Lightning continually descended from the sky.

The target was clearly the insolent one who had injured the divine beast. Instinctively, Erica began running before the thunder and lightning could burn her into charcoal.

Crash!

Lightning flashed, while thunder roared.

Intense lightning struck the place she had been standing only two seconds ago.

Feeling the impact and the hot breeze that shook her skin, she decided it was probably time to retreat.

Even if the fight continued in this manner, she could only maintain the current situation at best. Having decided to retreat, Erica leapt once again, moving to the next rooftop, and jumped repeatedly.

If she stood still, she would be immediately burnt to ash by the [Goat]'s lightning.

Erica glanced up at the sky.

Running across the air—no, hovering in the air was the giant [Goat].

Up until now, all the divine beasts that appeared had been defeated by the mysterious tornado, but what about this [Goat]? Will the opposing deity appear?

As she pondered over these things, Erica calculated her escape route.

Jumping down directly and mixing herself amongst the crowd would be the safest, but that would also bring great tragedy.

Erica went 'hmph' and quickly abandoned the notion.

As a proud knight, how could she possibly choose such a despicable manner of retreat? Of course it was rejected resolutely.

Then, there was only one path to pick.

The direction towards the steep mountains that could be seen from Cagliari.

Erica continued to jump and make her way towards that direction. By doing so, at least she could lead the [Goat] away from the streets, giving people more time to escape. That was what she concluded.

"Thou art still alive, boy, looks like our lives are very tough to extinguish."

Getting out of the fleeing crowd with great difficulty—

The two met once again and those were the youth's first words, spoken with his usual casual tone.

"Yes, let me say first, I was very worried about you... Though I've been travelling from place to place, your safety weighed heavily in my heart all along."

Looking over the youth's appearance in detail, Godou replied.

As before, the youth was wearing a tattered coat. His face was very delicate and proper, with a kind of fleeting charm that remained unchanged from the time they first met in Cagliari.

But there was a certain sense of dissonance.

Godou felt strange, this guy was different from before. There was no change in appearance, but something was obviously off. What was it?

"Hoho, thy instincts are excellent. With the proper education, perhaps thou wilt become an amazing priest."

Watching the puzzled Godou, the youth smiled.

His smiling face was the same as before, but somehow it gave off a more adult feeling.

—Wait a minute. What did this guy just say?

"Hey, you just said something strange. Something about education and priests."

"Payest no heed, I was just talking to myself. Rather, thou shouldst thank destiny for letting us meet once again. Our fates seem to be deeply intertwined."

No, this was absolutely not the result of destiny but human intent.

The reason they came was because Kusanagi Godou and Erica Blandelli had expected to meet the youth here.

However, why did he not have the courage to speak out about this?

Sensing his hesitation in this affair, Godou found a different feeling was surfacing, one unlike the mutual feelings he shared with the youth when they first met.

Crash! At this time, the crash of thunder sounded.

Lightning was striking nearby? Godou and the youth looked up and surveyed the surroundings.

"—Erica!"

Several flashes of lightning could be seen descending, while Erica was jumping left and right to evade them.

Seeing this scene unfold, Godou could not help crying out.

If this continued, wouldn't she be fried to death by lightning in one hit? Despite the horrific situation, Erica's running silhouette still carried such righteous poise.

The giant [Goat] had begun flying close to the surface at some point.

Gliding over the buildings pursuing the beautiful blonde girl, the direction Erica was headed was the foot of the mountains outside of town.

Moving rapidly between roofs, Erica ran like an arrow.

She was probably doing this to prevent creating more victims in Dorgali.

However, was it really safe for her to run over wide open spaces without any cover?

Forgetting their disputes over the past few days, Godou was now consumed with worry for Erica's safety.

"What is this, that girl came as well. Looketh like our fates are very intertwined too."

Under such conditions, the youth still maintained his leisurely airs.

"Yes, a lot has happened and I am currently travelling with her. Anyway, if this continues it might get tragic. I am going to chase after her! What are you going to do!?"

"Thou oughtst give up. Even if thou goest over, thou wilt not be of any use."

The youth calmly advised Godou who had exclaimed recklessly without thought.

Godou only shook his head strongly, refuting with determination.

"Even so, I cannot watch and do nothing!"

Erica was definitely an annoying woman.

Every time she spoke, it was mostly displeasing complaints. Treating others with friendly passion, but always mocking him mercilessly when she spoke to him, as well as being willful, self-centered, even so...

She wasn't someone so hated that he could abandon her at a time of need.

Godou ran in the same direction as her, determined.

Though she was very annoying in many areas, it is a fact that she was now fighting alone, taking on a god as her opponent. Pretending not to see and ignoring her need for assistance—impossible.

Of course, Godou knew this was stupid and impulsive, but even so.

"Thou art truly a fool. Though thou art a fool, that girl is not much better, fighting alone is proof of that. There are clearly simpler ways to escape, but she chooseth such a difficult one."

The youth was surprised.

"And I, observing, somehow cannot watch her perish without aid, how vexing!"

Come to think of it, didn't this youth also possess incredible powers?

Godou thought back to when they parted ways at Cagliari, when he experienced the youth's unbelievable power of domination—was that also magic? Or powerful hypnosis?

If that kind of power was used again, it would be problematic. As Godou tried to retreat, the youth smiled.

A classic and quaint smile.

With a kind of fleeting essence, it was a smile like mist.

At this time Godou noticed, the reason why he felt a dissonance when they met again, was here.

The youth was more unnatural than before, compared to a living human, it felt more like facing an intricately crafted Buddha statue. An indescribable sense of dissonance.

"Restest assured, though ye are all fools, but foolish children are very adorable. I shall not stop thee, in fact I will grant thee power—so, takest out that object thou hidest."

Suddenly the youth held out his hand.

"W-What am I hiding?"

"Is that not so? When I first talked to thee at the pier, its taste attracted me. I can feel that thing's taste is even more intense than last time. Makest haste, openest that bundle."

"That stone tablet!"

The youth's gaze was focused on Godou's backpack, and he finally understood.

Godou hurriedly took out the stone tablet—[Secret Tome of Prometheus].

"Yes, no mistake, this hidest ancient wisdom—never would I think such a specimen still lay hidden in the mortal realm. With this, even in my current state, I can resolve the matter."

The ancient stone tablet whose surface depicted an imprisoned man in a childish drawing.

The youth narrowed his eyes with interest, looking at the picture.

"Oh, the punished Titan... Sun... Fire... Foolish commoners... Salvation. I see, this carriest the power of [Theft]! Haha, the [Deceiver] Prometheus! Deceiving the gods, the hero thief who led the humans—thou art the presence I felt at the pier that time!"

Hearing the joyful laughter, Godou noticed something.

He hadn't told him the name [Secret Tome of Prometheus], but why was the youth able to call out its name? Could he really be a supernatural existence?

"...Like Erica and the rest, are you a mage?"

"No, I am completely different from them, but currently still incomplete. As long as I cannot recall my name, I will continue to

be incomplete. However, it recently dawned upon me, perhaps staying in this state might not be too bad after all."

While smiling wryly, the youth was caressing the [Secret Tome of Prometheus].

"Hath someone used this stone tablet before? Within this thing, resides the stolen power of some deity."

"Stolen?"

"Yes, did I not say the power of [Theft]? This piece of stone possesseth the characteristic of stealing a god's authority, and then storing it within it... However, if the target was a powerful deity, most likely only a portion of power will be taken. This oughtst to come in handy, very interesting."

Holding the stone tablet, the youth pointed at the hills a couple hundred meters away.

In that direction were Erica and the pursuing [Goat].

"Then I shall vanquish the monster—boy, thou mayst accompany me!"

It was already quite far away from the streets of Dorgali.

In the heavy rain, Erica had arrived at the foot of the mountain where the green woods and the dried out white rocks lay.

Nearby were several trees, but it was essentially a wide open stone quarry.

Running here, Erica finally stopped. Looking at the direction of the streets, the [Goat] looked leisurely, but it was actually charging here at great speed.

Then, what should she do next? Erica began to search for ideas.

The best solution was probably to use an illusory spell to hide, directly tricking the eyes of the divine beast.

But it would be best to stall for more time, if she were to disappear from its sights, it was likely the [Goat] would immediately turn back to destroy the town.

"...About fifteen minutes, probably could stall for that duration?
"

Breathing irregularly from anxiety, Erica murmured to herself.

Exhausting her mind and her body from the divine beast's pursuit, Erica made estimates based on her remaining battle ability
.

Hopefully, it would be best if people could finish evacuating during this bit of time.

To stall for even longer, Erica—no, perhaps there was no one who could achieve that feat, it was up to the mercy of the heavens.

Calmly counting her options, Erica looked up to the [Goat] with eyes of great battle spirit.

In that instant, she found something unexpected.

—Black lightning.

Descending from the sky, black lightning struck the massive body of the [Goat].

Roar!

The air was filled by painful screams, how could the divine beast be moaning from being struck by its own weapon—lightning ?

At this time, Erica noticed that the black lightning descending upon the [Goat] was a different existence.

Like a curse materialized, it was extremely similar in nature to Erica's own Golgotha spell words.

Materializing a consciousness full of hate and regret, forming a black curse that brought disaster to its surroundings.

Even without the disposition of a spirit vision user, Erica could easily recognize that the black lightning's curse was very intense. But where did such a curse come from?

—Could the second deity have made its appearance?

After being struck countless times by the black lightning, the [Goat] finally crashed down from the sky, making Erica's nerves tense.

Immediately after leaving Dorgali's streets, the youth had pointed the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] at the sky.

And then, from black clouds appeared several black streaks of lightning that struck the [Goat]. Every time it was hit by the flash of lightning, the flying monster gave off cries of pain. Struck by lightning, the [Goat] was in great pain.

Subsequently, bathed in uncountable lightning, the [Goat] fell to the ground.

Suddenly falling into the empty rocky field outside the streets, its gigantic body was convulsing. Godou's eyes widened at the sight of the unexpected downfall of the monster.

"This is nothing, the monsters were never as strong as their appearance suggested. Of course, from the perspective of mortal humans, they are perhaps the greatest threat. However, this is just an unstable creation split from a deity's authority—Simply by applying a little divine power, they will fall like that."

"T-Though I don't really understand, you're saying that it looks big, but it's actually quite weak?"

"Yes, not a bad explanation, thou shouldst be praised... However, this victory was thanks to this piece of stone, carrying the curse of some earth god, it came in handy."

Casually watching the [Goat] lying on the ground, the youth casually conversed with Godou.

Standing beside the bragging friend whose true qualities were gradually being revealed, Godou felt increasingly puzzled.

The description of splitting out from a god was exactly the same as Lucretia Zola's—'the god of the golden sword was shattered into several gigantic monsters.'

This youth clearly knew more about the situation than Erica, the one called a genius prodigy by Lucretia Zola. Who on earth was he ?

"Godou, you are in cahoots with this guy after all!?"

An elegant voice of accusation suddenly sounded out.

The owner of the voice was Erica of course. She had most likely witnessed the fall of the [Goat] and had hurried over.

Though wet from the rain and her body covered with mud, her splendor could not be suppressed. Or rather, it could be said that placed in such an extreme state, her beauty was even more emphasized.

"It's not like that, we just met by chance in town... Didn't you also say we were likely to meet him?"

Godou answered with reservation.

Of course, compared to Erica's harsh attitude, Godou's preference for the youth remained unchanged—but every time he thought of the youth's unknown origins, his doubts increased.

Could it be... no, it must be like that.

"...Hey, the one who defeated that divine beast was you, right?"

Wary due to Godou's words, Erica watched the youth with sinister eyes.

She also noticed the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] held in the youth's hand.

"Yes, thanks to this arcane stone of [Theft], the monster was defeated."

"To have deciphered the power possessed by this grimoire—in other words, could you be a spirit vision user? This is impossible without the highest grade of spirit vision."

"Hoho, askest not my identity, my name is currently sealed."

Faced with Erica's queries, the youth's unfazed attitude remained unchanged.

"By the way, there is something I must tell ye, make haste and depart—a second one will be here soon. A very ferocious and violent fellow, it would be best not to approach it."

"A second one?"

Hearing the warning, Godou frowned.

Squawk!

The howl of a strange bird came forth. What was this sound? Godou and Erica looked up in the air simultaneously. Who knows how many times they have experienced this sense of fear today?

—This time it was a golden [Raptor].

Gliding on its gigantic wings in the vast overcast skies, a bird of prey possessing golden feathers.

Come to think of it, Lucretia had also mentioned a hawk born from the sword god, however, this probably wasn't a hawk, Godou felt it was more like an eagle.

The best description was probably still a [Raptor].

Its wingspan from tip to tip, measured about fifty or sixty meters.

Flapping its wings powerfully in the Dorgali skies, the giant bird of prey was circling ferociously, the name of raptor was rather fitting.

"—Isn't that dangerous?"

Every time the [Raptor] flapped its wings in the air, a vortex of wind was created as it turned.

Strong wind became a cyclone, and then a gale, and further strengthened to become a tornado—in an extremely short period of time, the wind from the flapping of the wings has created a tornado that were now attacking the streets.

All sorts of objects, large and small, were being blown high into the air.

If such strong tornados were produced in the center of the streets, the massive destruction caused would completely dwarf the [Goat]'s lightning.

Just as Godou felt despair, Erica questioned the youth.

"...Did you call the bird too?"

"Wrong, girl, I did not call them. It is in search of me, that they came."

Showing a flawless smile, the youth answered.

Godou felt troubled by his casual demeanor even at such a time of crisis, but was unable to tear his gaze from the youth's handsome features. Unbelievably, he was being attracted and could not help listening to him.

...This was not right, it cannot continue.

"I see... Then you—could you be..."

"Hoho, sayest it not out loud. It is better that way. So, boy and little lady, ye make haste and leave. Though heartless to put it this way, the town is doomed, only destruction awaits."

The youth pressed the tip of his index finger on his lips.

As if hoping Erica would be quiet, but Godou ignored it, and faced the handsome youth:

"Wait a minute, it can't be confirmed that it will be destroyed, right?"

"It is certain, the power stored in the stone of Prometheus has been exhausted just now. There is no other way to drive the monster away. If thou cannot understand that, then thou can only be described as foolish."

"I understand, but I can't accept it!"

Impulsively, Godou yelled out.

Just now when he chased after Erica, he had felt the same way. Even if it was impossibly difficult, he had to face things directly.

Even now, Godou did not want to run, or abandon the sight before him.

Like a headstrong child, Godou realized it. But thinking of the tragedy brought by the tornado, imagining Erica struggling against the monster alone, Godou would feel greatly unsettled, so he had to indulge in his stubbornness—

"If this were ancient times, I would bestow my protection upon thee, welcoming thee as my warrior, sending thee forth to the battlefield—"

Faced with an ignorant child's willfulness, one could only appease him as much as possible.

With an expression like a father, the youth nodded his head.

"Now that it is said, boy, thou also complained the same way just now. Ignoring the wisdom of survival for the weak—appeasing the powerful and bowing down to the strong. Thou art truly hopeless."

Hmph. The youth lightly sighed sadly.

"Perhaps this will be the last time I assist thee with thy foolishness. Once those two beasts are vanquished, I can no longer play around leisurely. Truly, to lose my time of rest for this kind of brat, what a shame!"

"...? What are you talking about?"

Completely unable to understand the youth's words, Godou questioned.

What on earth was he saying? But he didn't answer, and only threw the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] over.

Godou frantically caught it.

"Holdest it. Perhaps this piece of stone will be needed another time."

"Eh?"

"Boy, promisest me. When the time cometh, usest that for the world."

Leaving behind those words, the youth suddenly ran.

Towards the streets of Dorgali—the direction where the tornado was spawned by the circling [Raptor].

"This is likely the goodbye of a lifetime. Fare thee well!"

Godou wanted to run after him, but was instantly distanced.

Like the wind. The youth was running with speed like the wind , and instantly disappeared.

"That guy, he already said the enemy was dangerous, what could he be trying to do now?"

Muttering to himself as he ran, Godou suddenly found a gust of wind blowing around his surroundings.

The gust of wind strengthened, and blew towards the Dorgali sky where the [Raptor] was flying.

"Godou, be careful! It's coming!"

"Coming? What!?"

Warned by Erica who had caught up, Godou snarled angrily in response.

"The second deity appearing in Cagliari! The wind god that defeated the monster, no, the war god possessing the incarnation of wind!"

At this time, the other gust of wind had become a vortex, and the second tornado was formed.

The strong wind blowing outside Dorgali's streets became a vortex.

Before this sight, the [Raptor] stopped circling. Suddenly, the tornado in the streets vanished.

The giant bird immediately charged at the remaining tornado.

The tornado that could even blow the [Boar] into the air, capture it, and raise it to the sky.

Flying towards the center, the [Raptor] remained in control.

Not only was it not caught in the wind, it was flying in the reverse direction of the tornado's spin. Under some unknown principles, the [Raptor]'s high speed flying caused the tornado to gradually slow down.

This was too ridiculous. Godou felt fear as he stood lifeless, rooted to the ground.

In an instant, the tornado vanished.

However, appearing beside the [Raptor] was an object—the golden sword.

Giant golden steel, a massive blade just as large as the [Raptor]'s wingspan, it was a double-bladed sword.

This [Sword] floated in midair, facing off against the [Raptor], as if held in a stance by an invisible giant warrior, it was a most peculiar sight.

"As expected... That deity can change his form according to the situation. The war god possessing numerous incarnations is...!"

At some point in time, Erica had come to Godou's side.

The two of them no longer had the strength to run, and could only watch the battle between the [Raptor] and the [Sword].

With speed that was almost too fast to be seen, the [Raptor] flying in the air.

Every time wind blew like a sonic wave, the ground was made a mess. It had not yet reached the speed of sound, but it was still very fast.

Even so, the [Sword] still held the advantage.

Faced with the super-fast opponent, it was leisurely dancing in the air with elegance, continually making slashing attacks.

The skillful swordsmanship landed blows upon the circling [Raptor].

With every successful slash, golden feathers danced in the air as fresh blood stained the ground red.

The decisive moment of the battle finally arrived.

The golden blade made a deep cut on the giant body of the [Raptor], chopping it into two.

And then, the split body of the bird of prey turned into particles like sand and began to crumble. These particles were then absorbed by the blade of the [Sword].

However, this was not the end.

The golden [Sword] then pierced the goat that had fallen on the ground.

With the final blow—it should be described that way, the powerless giant beast lying on the ground had its neck pierced, it was an unhesitating finishing blow.

And so the [Goat]'s giant body also turned into particles of light , and were absorbed by the [Sword].

Somehow the rain had stopped, and the wind and thunder had vanished.

As the sun's rays reached the ground, the golden [Sword] suddenly vanished without trace.

Leaving behind Dorgali, ravaged by divine might, as well as the speechless Godou and Erica who was watching the sky with a very complicated expression.

Chapter 5 - I, Have Long Sought Defeat

Part 1

Ancient ruins and a beautiful ocean. These were known as Sardinia's most important tourist attractions.

All over the island were a total of over seven thousand stone edifices—Nuraghes.

The civilization that built these dated back to roughly the fifteenth century BCE. At that time, the people living on the island of Sardinia gathered around the nuraghes to build their settlements and lived there.

Then came the period of early history with the arrival of the Phoenicians.

They first made contact with the island as seafaring merchants. Finally in the year 509 BCE, the entire island of Sardinia came under the rule of the Phoenician city of Tharros.

Then the Romans came.

Under the rule of the Roman Republic and then the Empire, the Romans rebuilt the streets constructed by the Phoenicians, making it their own residence.

This was why Roman and Phoenician ruins existed side by side on the island of Sardinia.

The current location was now the province of Oristano, on the west of the island where there was an abundance of ancient ruins.

In order to open sea routes to reach the western coastline, the Phoenicians had established cities at Aristanis and Tharros.

—Especially Tharros.

These ruins were located on a headland protruding from the peninsula. Though half of it had sunk into the sea, it was still preserved till modern times.

It was a city built by the Phoenicians of Tyre—the people whose divine protector was Melqart.

"Melqart and his primary identity Baal were deities intimately related to Phoenician culture and customs. Have you heard of Hannibal?"

"The name of the movie? Or you mean the general who marched into Rome?"

This was the provincial capital of Oristano on the west of the island.

Like Nuoro it was a well-developed city, but closer to the sea. The wind carried the taste of seawater. Perhaps due to that, the air felt very free and open here.

It was inside a certain pizza shop in the city.

Seated at the open air tables, Erica and Godou were eating. Now that he thought about it, this was the first time for Godou to eat pizza in Italy.

This was Roman crispy and thin-crusted style rather than the rumored Neopolitan thick-crusted style.

"Of course, Hannibal means 'beloved son of Baal' while his father's name, Hamilcar... That one is 'Melqart's servant.' Both were very typical Phoenician names."

"...So, is this why we came here?"

The next day after encountering the giant beasts at Dorgali, the two of them had set off for this little town.

First they returned to Cagliari in the south, and then traveled west taking the car hired by Erica, arriving at Oristano after about two hours.

Erica had mentioned, the ruins of Tharros was approximately twenty kilometers away from the town.

The ruins of the foundation laid by Phoenicians, later enhanced by the Romans with aqueducts and other city functions, was now just a deserted tourist attraction.

"So, about that god with the golden sword, is there any problem ? And the other guy—the fellow who claimed amnesia and disappeared, is it fine to let him be?"

"It doesn't matter anymore, I've pretty much solved the riddle."

Erica's response made Godou very anxious.

To Godou, rather than what they were doing, he wanted to learn more about the [Sword] god he saw yesterday.

The god that had defeated the giant beasts all over the island, the god that seemed closely linked to the youth. But Erica appeared to have completely lost interest in that god.

"Currently, the incarnations causing havoc all over the island belong to the sword god, right? That should be the most dangerous, which is why preparations should be made against them first."

"Even if the incarnations of the sword god appear, at most there will be one or two, and they will be defeated as soon as they show up. Which is why it is more efficient to track down the missing Melqart... Besides, I think I have a good idea of the identity of the sword god."

Erica's answer made Godou surprised, when did she investigate to such detail?

"You're amazing... Even though I didn't see you investigate, how did you find out?"

"Because I already spent a lot of effort finding out yesterday, it's probably a deity from around Persia or India... It feels more like a Persian god, because there was something like a hawk or an eagle."

Sitting in the open air, Erica spoke as she looked bored.

"But for you to say those monsters will be instantly defeated, isn't that judgment too early to make?"

"No problem. Even though the incarnations know they will be vanquished, they are still compelled to follow the principal body—So, end of discussion. I need to contact the local association and it will take some time. Do you understand?"

"Local? ...That's right, the secret associations between magi."

Godou was puzzled by the term association, but immediately recalled.

"Correct, this is the closest town to the Tharros ruins, so the chance of getting information is highest."

"Could it be, there's a god in those ruins?"

"That shouldn't happen. [Heretic Gods] usually avoid people, it is rare for them to stay in tourist spots. However, ancient holy lands and temples do hold some attraction for them. If the gods are near, the local mage associations should have noticed."

After this conversation, Erica left the pizza shop first.

When Godou suggested to make a phone call inquiry first, Erica explained that it was very impolite to make direct requests to local magi without meeting face to face.

It looked like there were all sorts of rules in the world of magi.

After that, Godou took a stroll in town to kill time.

Thinking carefully, it's been a while since he did something like a tourist, but there was no feeling of happiness. He had been meeting gods all along, and was now chasing after them.

—When Erica returned, the sun was already setting.

Without deciding on a time and place to meet up, she suddenly appeared out of nowhere, probably using that person finding magic she mentioned the day before.

"Coming here was right."

Those were Erica's first words.

"—Though it's not clear whether it's Melqart or the sword god, a [Heretic God] definitely descended near here. The local magi sensed the divine presence and are now panicking. Since I came here as a scout, I was able to obtain a lot of information."

"A god is coming again..."

Completely unable to hide his nervous tension, Godou's reaction made Erica show an expression that was hard to describe.

If you have something to say, just say it directly. This wasn't like her usual expression.

"What is it? You have some kind of worry?"

"Godou, may I ask... You're not going back to Japan?"

"Ah?" To the sudden question, Godou was taken aback. Up until now, weren't you the one who insisted on dragging me along, this ordinary Japanese?

"It's already come to this, like a patient in advanced stages of the disease, how can I just quit in the middle?"

He was certain he would regret it if he returned to Japan without seeing things to the end. Angry that he had lost sight of the youth again yesterday, Godou replied immediately:

"At least, without confirming the status of that guy, I do not plan to return."

"That guy—must be the boy, right? Even if you obsess over him, I don't think it will end well."

"...Not only the god, you even know about that guy?"

Erica answered the question with the same subtle expression just now.

In other words, she knew but did not wish to reveal the answer. This pessimism was unlike her.

"I know, but it's completely different from my initial expectations. But I think I understand the gist of it. I was worried it might come as a blow to you, so I haven't told you."

Seeing Erica's expression, Godou realized he made a huge error.

He always thought she was an arrogant and self-centered narcissist, but she turned out to pay more attention to details than he imagined, and also had a thoughtful side to her.

Perhaps the reason why Erica didn't want to say more, was in consideration for Godou.

Realizing that, Godou fell silent.

...Thinking back, this was perhaps the earliest instant when the distance shrank between Kusanagi Godou and Erica Blandelli.

"However, personally, I have no opinion as long as the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] is here. Whether you carry it and tag along or give it to me and return to Japan, it doesn't matter to me. So if you are afraid, please return to your homeland, I won't stop you."

Perhaps Erica also noticed herself the sense of dissonance stemming from her concern for Godou.

Her attitude became stiff and she spoke rapidly.

Seeing such a reaction from her, Godou felt like laughing for the first time, so he immediately answered.

"Then it's decided. I will follow you to the end. Even if you say no, I will follow you, and probably bring you lots of trouble. Is that fine?"

"—Not fine, but whatever. From now on, you will continue to be responsible for my luggage. Be prepared!"

Seeing Erica act a little embarrassed, Godou nodded.

Thinking carefully, he had already spent three days traveling with her. It was pretty much time to make peace.

"Let me make this clear, all I need is this grimoire, don't misunderstand. To be honest, it's not like I need you at all. Understood?"

"Understood, carved into my heart."

Regarding the words mentioned by the youth about the [Secret Tome of Prometheus], all of it was reported completely.

After that, Erica carefully examined the grimoire dating from the era of the gods, manipulating it in various ways, but could only give up in the end. She still couldn't figure out how to use it.

The youth who could easily solve this problem that stumped the genius witch, who on earth could he be?

Part 2

The faint light of the setting sun had become true darkness.

With Erica in the lead, and Godou following behind, the two of them were advancing in a dark forest.

"Wait up, it's so dark I can't even see beneath my feet, go slightly slower!"

"How useless. Such poor night vision, you didn't train enough?"

"Ordinary people do not have that kind of training! Don't use your set of rules to view the world!"

Advancing as they talked, the only sources of light were the stars in the sky and the moonlight in the dark night.

A forest at night which could not provide any artificial lighting.

With only a flashlight in one hand, Godou walked with difficulty, while Erica moved quickly and nimbly in contrast.

Without relying on artificial lighting, advancing swiftly into the depths of the forest, she could see in the dark as well as if it were day.

Taking a taxi north from Oristano, it took roughly an hour or so.

The Nuraghe sa Bastia was situated in a vast forest nearby.

There were the remains of many poorly preserved nuraghes and settlements. Though the area also contained a number of well-preserved specimens, but from the perspective of tourists, this place was not popular.

However, in spite of that—

Before the sun had completely set, the majestic forms of the nuraghes made for excellent scenery.

Green thriving forests, and ancient towers standing tall.

Nuraghes were comparatively tall structures on this island, towering enough to look down upon the tops of the tall trees. Even from outside the forest, one could catch glimpses of the structures skillfully built with stone.

"...But aren't these nuraghes built by the civilization before the Phoenicians arrived? Whether Melqart or the sword god, why would they hide here?"

"Perhaps attracted by the spiritual presence of the sacred land."

On the way, Erica replied to the question Godou asked due to boredom.

"The presence of nuraghes indicates the remains of an ancient settlement. These settlements were even more sacred than temples or tombs. Attracted by the spiritual presence of the land, there are often cases where [Heretic Gods] intrude upon the residences of unrelated gods."

"In other words, living in another god's territory was more comfortable than their own?"

As they chatted like this, they finally entered the area around the nuraghe.

An empty field in the depths of the forest, it looked like a plaza with great visibility.

Though obscured by the spreading weeds, the remnants of all sorts of stone crafted structures could be seen.

Now that it's mentioned, nuraghes also had rooms and staircases.

This civilization peaked at around the tenth century BCE.

At the time, it is incredible to think such large scale construction could be undertaken in such sparsely populated areas. Godou felt that on some level, this represented advanced techniques beyond modern construction technology. With his only light source being the bit of light from the flashlight in his hand, the feeling of regret was especially intensified.

At that moment, Godou suddenly felt a strong sense of chill.

—What was this?

There was an unbelievable feeling coming from a corner of the plaza.

His eyes were drawn to it.

There was only a large tree with a thick trunk, as well as a massive pile of stone from something that collapsed.

Hidden on the ground by these objects, was something like a cave.

Pointing his flashlight into the darkness, Godou focused his eyesight.

This was roughly triangular, there was a hole in the ground shaped like a triangle.

"What is that? There's a very unpleasant feeling, what is going on with me?"

Hearing Godou speak, Erica seemed to be mouthing to herself some kind of chant. She was probably using some kind of magic.

"...Godou, you're quite sharp, that must be the entrance to the temple. But..."

"But?"

"I am currently using a spell to sense for magic. And it looks like my hunch is correct. Magical power with a slightly unique feeling is leaking out from there, *he* is probably there."

He was referring to a god, of course.

Erica stared at the silent Godou, and then spoke.

"After we have encountered those supernatural phenomenon several times, your senses towards the presence of gods seems to have become very sharp, like an animal, miko, or Shinto priest... What unexpected talent. However, by itself it can't be regarded as a useful talent—who knows what may happen, wait for me here."

Leaving those words behind, Erica went forward.

Climbing over the stones, she jumped into the triangular hole.

Godou waited for a while, looked at the hole where Erica had disappeared, thought for a while and then finally with a cry of " damn it", followed after her.

...Within the hole were stairs leading down.

An underground temple.

For people that worshiped primitive nature, to think that they would possess such intricate buildings—

The knowledge and techniques of the ancients sometimes surpassed the average modern human. This was evidence before his eyes. Godou felt very touched, but he couldn't stand there for long.

The interior of the temple was also skillfully assembled with rocks, with the gaps filled in by using small stones.

Using the flashlight to illuminate the ground near his feet, Godou advanced along the underground passage as quickly as he could.

Sardinia had a Mediterranean climate, so the air was basically quite dry. However, the air flowing underground was very humid. Could there be some kind of pool?

"Godou! Why did you follow me?"

After walking for a bit, a sudden voice came from in front.

Erica was staring with eyes as sharp as a sword, so it seems like Godou caught up to her without issue.

"You forgot that, the thing called Prometheus whatever."

"By the way... Since I still don't know how to use it, I forgot all about it. Rather than this unreliable tool, I believe it's more practical to rely on my own techniques."

Godou's improvised excuse, was immediately refuted by her.

I see, so that's why Lucretia was worried about her.

"The one who said there's a god here, wasn't that you? Is it fine to just go in directly?"

"Even if it's a [Heretic God], such a thing as eating humans on sight—should be very rare. Unlike those divine beasts, they don't go around causing random destruction, so the danger isn't as high. I'm just going to slip in to investigate a bit and then come back. You don't have to worry."

"That's not how it goes, worrying is human nature..."

Hearing Erica's reply, Godou suddenly felt taken aback by his sudden decision to follow and disregard his own safety.

She did not say it was completely safe, but from her judgment, danger was not that high, so willing to bear that risk, she decided to enter this dangerous place alone.

Perhaps fully confident in her talent and skills, even though a little reckless, she believes she can handle things herself. From her actions so far, when the time comes to retreat, she will calmly retreat...

"Besides, you're the unbelievable one. An ordinary boy with clearly no combat ability, daring to enter this place. It is enough for you to carry the luggage obediently. Please don't make such decisions on your own!"

"Yes, well... Perhaps it's because of that."

"Ah, what?"

"...Don't look at me like that. I am a man after all. Even if you tell me not to follow because it's dangerous, I can't agree obediently. How can I hide in a safe place and let a girl do something so dangerous alone. Perhaps it's a man's principles, I believe that's why I insist."

Ever since he came to this island, Godou has been frustrated by his impotence.

Erica was the genius witch with the title of knight.

Even someone as amazing as her had enemies that were deemed impossible to overcome... heretic gods.

The handsome youth who possessed incredible power and claimed amnesia.

In the midst of these people, Godou was only a minor side character. A role whose absence or presence was irrelevant. A powerless person without any influence over the final outcome of the entire incident.

Even so, when the status of the youth familiar to him was unknown, Godou wanted to search for him.

For the people who suffered from the tyranny of the gods, Godou wanted to offer his own efforts.

Seeing a girl fight alone by herself, he cannot back down. Without forcing himself too much, he had to protect her.

Spurred by these feelings and principles, Godou had come this far.

He also realized it was unbelievable, but stopping himself was a difficult thing, or perhaps, completely impossible.

"You are an idiot. A completely hopeless idiot—you seemed a little smart on first glance, but how can you be this stupid? I am totally speechless."

Faced with Erica's mockery, Godou did not retort but simply continued:

"Also, if the sword god appears—perhaps that guy will also appear? So I want to come along to find out what happened to him . If I don't confirm it with my own eyes, I will not return to Japan."

"Is this also part of a man's principles? What an idiot."

Just as you say. Faced with Godou's confession, Erica could not help but sigh deeply.

"Fine, whether the child or the sword god, if I'm with you, it will be safer for me. That child has fancied you..."

"Fancied me?"

"Don't mind me, I'm just talking to myself—fine, even if I send you back right now, you're going to return? Then follow me! But please don't get in my way!"

"Sorry, I've made trouble for you."

"Really! Let me declare beforehand, no matter what happens to you, I won't be responsible!"

The exasperated Erica began to grumble.

"Really! A man's principles whatever, just like that Genaro... I hate those kinds of ideals! I forbid you to mention them a second time!"

"Who is that? Sounds like someone I could get along with."

"My colleague, a Great Knight of the Copper Black Cross... Probably the one currently closest to achieving the title of [Diavolo Rosso]. The reason why I came to this island, was to prevent that honor from falling in the hands of that unrefined man!"

Having spoken in hateful tones, Erica turned her sharp gaze to Godou.

"To think you would be such a troublesome boy, I am completely surprised. Whoever becomes your future lover or wife will definitely have a life of hardship, oh how I pity her."

"W-Why are you suddenly talking about that kind of thing?"

Every male in the history of the Kusanagi family, had been legendary with the uncanny ability to make women cry broken-hearted.

Godou had always prided himself on the fact that he was not that type of man. Why did this strange witch have to mock him in that particular way?

Anyway, the two of them continued towards the depths of the temple.

The passage stretched longer than imagined, and they had been walking for ten minutes or so. Along the way, there were quite a few forks in the road, but Erica used spells to sense and guide them, so they didn't get lost.

And then, the two of them finally encountered.

A true god. True might. True power personified—a [Heretic God].

"Humans fated to die. So, how long has it been for me, since I last met existences like you, face to face?"

His extremely low voice sounded like a roar from deep underground.

Like thunder, the sound was very thick and heavy.

"This little island was once part of my territory, but has now been taken and devastated by unknown people. Though I have left the earth for a very long time, thinking about what is happening on the surface pains me so... My apologies, to speak such words to you, please regard it as an old fool grumbling to himself."

Flowing in the depths of the subterranean temple was an underground spring.

The stone passage ended abruptly, and soil could be seen everywhere.

For a nation that worshiped [Water] as a sacred existence, this spring was probably the divine body that they made sacrifices to.

He was located on the bank of the spring.

A giant man in his prime, sitting on the altar at the water's edge.

Hair that probably had never been cut, as well as a beard that covered the entire lower half of his face. These gave an extremely strong first impression. He had a very wild appearance, and his height was easily over two meters.

It was the first time for Godou to see such a solid and muscular body.

Usually, with that kind of height, a person would look rather thin, but he was different. Given those massive bulging muscles, simply looking at him felt very oppressive.

His body was so spectacular, strong, and sacred.

Clearly wearing very coarse attire—dirty rags and a leather cuirass on his chest, as well as a tattered cape over his body, but there was a sense of awe and majesty.

Just facing him face to face made one want to bow their head and kneel.

"Letting you see my unsightly body, my apologies. You can understand from the sight, right? I am currently heavily injured, and treating my wounds, waiting for my body to be filled with power once again."

It was as he described.

Upon those solid pectoral muscles, a golden sword was deeply embedded.

However, the body of the blade was snapped, leaving no hilt behind. What remained was probably two thirds of the original length.

"So, do you know my name? Must I introduce my name and title? Or do you people find the names of ancient kings unimportant? Come, answer me."

The giant was questioning them with a voice carrying laughter.

Open and uninhibited, it was a voice full of humor. However, were he to be displeased, it would not be surprising to find it violently out of control—the voice was like the calm before a storm .

The meaning of his words were not lost, even on an ordinary person like Godou.

Based on the characteristics he had heard previously, the figure before him matched completely.

"Please allow me to speak. Your royal name is Melqart—if I am not mistaken."

The one who answered was Erica.

Afraid. The self-centered, unrelenting beauty was afraid!

Her trembling could be heard from her voice. The slight fear appearing on her beautiful face made Godou certain.

This could not be helped. Next to her, Godou had been shivering all along. It was too terrifying, the giant before them—the [Heretic God] Melqart was too terrifying!

This was a real king.

King of kings, king of gods.

Ruling the sky, possessing the right to destroy the world and all humans, he was the one with absolute authority. For the first time in his life of fifteen years, Godou truly experienced what the word [King] meant.

"Yes! I am Melqart. I also like the name Baal. Baal Hadad also sounds nice. But on this island, I should be called Melqart, hahahahaha!"

The king's laughter shook the underground temple.

This was no metaphor. Like a real earthquake, the ground shook, the walls shook, and so did the ceiling.

Waves were created in the spring water, splashing about, while Godou felt a shock on his skin as if electrified.

"So, little ones who don't even know the manners for a king, let me task you with a mission. Hurry back to the surface, and toil for the revival of the ancient king. Tell the people that Melqart is furious over the insignificant rats that have infested his territory. This little island, I will smash with my very arms and cast into the sea—you will warn the others thus!"

"Cast the island... into the bottom of the sea...?"

The sudden declaration made Godou speechless.

A divine king's decree could not be a lie. Though there was no evidence, Godou believed so.

"Correct, children who cannot escape the fate of death! When your own toys are covered in mud, surely you will do the same? Yes, wash the dirt away with water. I will use water to cleanse my land of this maggot infestation. Understood?"

I don't understand. How can I understand such twisted logic?

However, against the voice of the god declaring divine punishment, Godou was unable to object and could only tremble on the side.

Erica beside him was the same, though her expression was dark , she dared not retort against the god's outrageous decision, without even a hint of resistance in her eyes. Godou would never expect to see her with such an expression.

Godou was overcome with sadness and pity.

For this proud girl to show such an expression of despair, he did not want to see it!

Godou clenched his teeth, the will to resist showing on his face.

"So—I am currently in the middle of a battle against a troublesome foe. If you little children were able to sneak into this hole, that's not a very good sign."

Melqart laughed lightly.

To call the normal Godou and the witch Erica "little children," he was clearly looking down on them.

Perhaps it was all the same to him, just like compared to the brilliant sun in the sky, a first class star shining in the night was no different from a sixth class star.

"In order to prepare for the duel, I must sleep to recover my wounds. I have also cast a spell to prevent sneak attacks during my slumber, so you two better leave. Understood?"

Melqart laid himself down on a rock.

The action was crude and without thought. Whether this was a cave or out in the wilderness, or on silken bedding, this uninhibited sleeping posture like a savage was probably what he used on all occasions. His fortitude could be seen from this act.

—Scratch, scratch, scratch, scratch, scratch.

As soon as Melqart fell asleep, Godou and Erica heard strange noises.

Looking downwards at the source of the noise—the two were speechless.

Before they knew it, swarms of locusts had appeared on the stony ground beneath their feet. These tiny pests arrived in great numbers. Probably hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, no, much more than that. An uncountable number of locusts were restless and ready to move.

Disgust and fear instinctively filled Godou's heart.

This was a completely different kind of terror compared to Melqart's tyranny.

The locusts were approaching, jumping all around, and some were even spreading their wings to fly in the air.

Godou and Erica looked at each other simultaneously.

Exchanging glances, nothing needed to be said. Their minds thought alike, let's get out of here quickly from the way we came.

Paying attention to their surroundings, they dashed towards the exit as fast as they could.

In order not to be caught by the army of locusts pursuing them, the two ran at full speed without letting down their guard for a single moment, escaping hand in hand.

Part 3

Finally escaped from the underground temple, the two were panting heavily.

Looking back at the triangular entrance, several dozens of locusts were crawling and jumping about, or just lying there.

"W-What was that? S-So disgusting..."

"L-Locusts are the servants of Melqart. He is the god of storms, and also the god of the sea, god of the sun, and the god ruling over harvests and extinguished life... C-Consuming crops and causing widespread devastation to the land, locusts are also a symbol of his authority."

"S-Something like that, i-isn't that more like a demon's messenger!"

"M-Most demons used ancient gods like Baal or Melqart as their prototypes. R-Religions that developed later, demoted them to demons and passed along those stories, producing the current result... Y-You know? The demon, Lord of the Flies is based on Baal's other name, Beelzebub..."

Though they were still panting, Godou and Erica continued to converse.

For a great period of time, both of them did not even have the strength to stand, and simply let time pass.

The Nuraghe sa Bastia.

The forest surrounding these ruins.

The constellations of Italian spring twinkled quietly in the night sky.

During this time, the escaped genius witch and the former baseball youth met with setback, the two of them were leaning back to back, without seeing each other's face, tightly together.

Their heavy breathing had returned to normal, but even so, due to the sweat, the night breeze felt chilly and the two of them did not stand up.

"...That was amazing, I think I definitely cannot resist that god."

"...Same here, seeing those divine beasts have made me lower my guard. The [Heretic Gods] who stand at the true summit, I never expected such presence."

Through their backs pressed together, Godou could feel Erica's warmth.

Most likely she could also feel Godou's warmth the same way.

...In the end, the two of them were too naive. A true [Heretic God], the dominating power of the highest ranked gods, neither of them understood until now!

The presence and oppressiveness which utterly shattered a man's principles and a genius witch's pride.

Simply facing him caused all resistance to be blown away. Afterwards Godou thought, to have faced him without bursting into tears was already very brave.

"...So, what are you planning next, are you still going to investigate?"

"...What are you joking! Facing that kind of thing is impossible! If Melqart was in a bad mood, we surely would not have survived! "

Finally breathing smoothly, Godou turned his body around towards Erica.

But she replied to Godou anxiously, then remained silent as if displeased.

After that, the two of them sat on the ground for another ten minutes or so, simply staring at nothing.

The two were silent, and tried to avoid eye contact.

Particularly Erica, she hid her face behind her knees, clearly trying to ignore Godou.

This was the result of two people taking an optimistic attitude based on their capability and principles. Unworthy humans who underestimated a god, there were no grounds for complaint about the result.

All in all, it was very shocking.

Godou thought back to the embarrassment just now, and felt troubled.

Even though he prided in his competitive personality, he simply ran away just now. Clearly he dared to face the divine beasts at Dorgali despite his lack of power, but this time it didn't work.

What Erica had called divine beasts, as well as a true [Heretic God].

The two were on completely different levels. Absolute failure, complete and utter defeat.

Humiliation, impotence, and anger at himself.

Many intense feelings surfaced in his heart.

Even so—Godou renewed his thoughts as he watched the girl before him.

The impact she suffered, in terms of quality and quantity, must be on an entirely different level.

No matter what, Kusanagi Godou was just an ordinary person. No matter how he forced himself, he cannot defeat a god, it was just a setback, that's it.

But Erica was the one called the genius witch.

Even someone as talented as her, when faced with a god, ended up in the same state of terror as a commoner like Godou and ran for her life in panic. The shock she received could not be compared to his.

Godou gazed upon Erica as she wallowed in despair, refusing to look up.

The proud and headstrong girl was now burying her peerlessly magnificent face in her knees.

Godou knew from his experience in the past, battling alongside or against those with genius talent.

Currently, the root of Erica's 'magnificence' —her absolute confidence in her talent, capability and achievements was lost. Encountering such an event, a genius was still just an ordinary human.

If possible, Godou did not wish to see her like now.

Actually these were words that Godou would never speak out... even if his mouth would be ripped apart. Even though he had quarreled with her all this time, his heart had already been completely taken by the beauty of Erica Blandelli.

Godou took a deep breath.

If even himself, the less affected one, continued to despair, then all they could do was wait for their deaths.

It was now a situation where the seventh inning had ended and the first half of the eighth was beginning.[25]

As long as a homerun is hit with the bases all loaded, there was still a chance, and the former catcher and fourth hitter was not going to stay quiet like that.

"I... was playing baseball all along up until half a year ago."

Godou tried to speak in a cheerful manner.

"Though I am not very talented, I did practice with great effort, and gradually became one of the starters in a fairly high-ranked team. I was also picked in things like the Tokyo selection, etc... But gave up due to a shoulder injury."

"Your past is unexpected... Although I wouldn't think you were just a regular person from your stamina."

Her head still down, Erica's expression could not be seen.

But at least she responded, though her voice lacked strength, it was not a bad start.

"There were also many practice matches. Once, we were facing against a very strong high school baseball club in a match. We were only a middle school team. In other words, our opponents were restructuring their team and wanted to have a match with a weaker team."

"...In the world of sports, that's common, right?"

"True, but during middle school, ours was one of the top teams in Tokyo, so we went all out for the sake of our dignity... Though in the end we lost nine to two."

"...Completely expected from the two team's abilities."

"No, that's what it looks like, but the two points were scored all at once in the final inning, redeeming ourselves. It was a great match where we put in all our effort."

The batter who hit a double in the final inning, and scored two points was Godou, but he didn't mention it.

"So... What are you trying to say?"

"Ah yes, that's to say, even if we're losing we have to take back two points. That's the rough idea. So yeah, let's try harassing them for a little while..."

"...Godou, you're really terrible at speaking, time to shut up!"

Erica finally lifted her face.

Showing a deep frown that suited her good and proper beauty, this angry expression had great presence.

"...You can't be comparing an encounter with the king of gods, to a middle school student's extracurricular activities, right? If that's the case, you are so ridiculous I don't even know what to say !"

"Yes, is that so? But then, the determination required should be the same—"

"How can it be the same?!"

Unlike the time facing Melqart, this was now the beautiful face of anger.

Godou breathed in relief, compared to her disheartened look, anger suited her much better. As long as she didn't act like this all the time, treating him as an idiot.

"Really! And to think you would say something nice, so I listened quietly! Too disappointing. No talent, cannot speak, there's not even any value to rate!"

Uh, I didn't expect to be criticized that much.

"Umm, yes I really don't have a way with words, but do you really have to describe me that way?"

"So annoying, if your job is to carry the luggage, then act like it. Just shut up and follow me!"

Erica picked up Godou's backpack from the ground.

And then she violently threw it at Godou.

Skillfully catching his own backpack, Godou smiled.

"Yes, fine, as long as you pull yourself together, telling you those things was worth it."

"You're saying pull myself together? I always thought you were an idiot, but I never knew you were an idiot, first class. Could you be saying that I was feeling down?"

Though Erica's words were full of anger, Godou did not change his tone of voice.

"There's nothing to hide, right? It was a god, the opponent was too strong. Besides, weren't you bowing down your head, looking very depressed just now?"

"That kind of judgment is unforgivable stupidity... That was—fine, I was simply watching the ground, no other special meaning. Please do not rudely speculate."

This reason was too contrived.

Though her ability to deny was still skillful, but this explanation was way too forced. Even someone as strong as Erica could not find any good explanation for the way she acted just now.

Shrugging his shoulders, Godou smiled wryly, feeling that she was very cute.

Probably realizing her reason was very contrived, Erica's face went red.

"And that's that, about my actions being affected by you, please do not have any weird misunderstandings... However, for those very incompetent words of comfort, I will reward you one day. Though you have no gift with words, given that you have made

the effort, you will be compensated with equal value. I, Erica Blandelli, will absolutely not be stingy in this regard."

"I know I know. So, I will look forward to your reward."

Faced with the smooth and relaxed Godou, Erica could not continue to argue.

Nodding lightly, her face was still slightly red. Those unsightly behaviors that did not suit her, made her shyly shift her gaze away from Godou.

—But in the next instant, Erica suddenly stared towards the depths of the forest.

After less than ten seconds, she suddenly held out her hand.

"Godou, give me water. Quick."

"Why do you suddenly want water? Here you go."

Godou took out the plastic bottle of mineral water from his backpack and handed it to her.

Pouring the water on ground, Erica then pointed an index finger towards the pool of water, chanting lightly.

Watching the pool of water stir, Godou was very surprised.

Revealed was a stallion with white fur.

Compared to the familiar race horses in horseracing, its body was much strongly built, the four legs much thicker. Rather than a race horse, a war horse would be a better description.

"I say... This is not an ordinary horse, right?"

"Right, just now I felt strong magic gathering outside the forest. So I tried a far sight spell—"

Erica quietly replied to Godou's seeking of confirmation.

"An incarnation split from the sword god?"

"Of course... I've already decided, what are you planning to do?
"

Go over, or escape.

Even unspoken, he understood what Erica wanted to express.

"Though I understand well that my stubbornness cannot change anything, I am not someone who changes his mind so easily."

Godou exhaled as he spoke. And then Erica laughed as if mocking a fool.

"Fine, then follow behind me. This is not to protect you, but to let you witness me in action at close range, not bad right?"

"Hey... calling others idiot repeatedly, you're not that smart either."

"Please call this unrelenting fighting spirit. Listen carefully, the protagonist fails once but still stands up again and takes the final glory. Isn't that the required cliché?"

Bantering thus, Godou and Erica walked together.

With Erica in the lead, and Godou following, they set off towards the outside of the forest.

Forcing himself to advance through a forest at night with nothing but a flashlight and the moon, it was an ordeal for an ordinary person like Godou. After an hour or so, they finally left the forest.

It was near the outskirts of the forest.

More precisely, there seemed to be the approaching sound of a massive object crushing trees as it advanced.

—[White Stallion].

The divine beast seen just now through the far sight spell, finally began to rampage.

Godou and Erica exchanged glances and nodded simultaneously. The next part was not going to be that simple, and they confirmed each other's determination.

And then out of the lush forest, he appeared at that instant.

"Greetings, boy and the witch. Strolling in such a place."

Black hair reaching the shoulders, the handsome youth with the narrow face.

His eyes looked as if they could see the future, and he showed a classic and elegant smile like a Buddha statue of Maitreya Bodhisattva.[26]

The youth Godou had met twice, at Cagliari and Dorgali.

"I must warn thee, thou art only mortal, dost not interfere in the war amongst our kind. To that witch there as well. Thou hast learnt the basics of magic, but thy power is vastly dwarfed by ours. The path of humans and gods can never cross."

No, Godou felt something wasn't right.

Compared to the youth he saw before, there was a decisive difference.

Slender and not very tall, yet somehow there was a powerful presence.

A delicate face like Maitreya Bodhisattva. However this made one feel that he was an inhuman existence impossible to understand.

This was not a human face, only made in the image of man, so it was a work of art more beautiful than any human.

—Right, why did I not notice until now?

The force felt from that delicate body, and the divine presence inhabiting that handsome face.

Though their appearances were completely different, he and Melqart had the same atmosphere.

Godou cursed his own stupidity, for how could someone so out of the ordinary be a normal person?

Having encountered Melqart, Godou suddenly understood.

He was a god.

The other [Heretic God], was now standing before his eyes.

Part 4

"Will you grace the unworthy with your name, undefeated god of the east?"

Suddenly Erica knelt down, bowing her head in respect.

Looking down at her, the youth—correction, the youth god showed what was clearly a wry smile.

"Unnecessary. Thou hast discerned my true identity so quickly, clever girl!"

Then he narrowed his eyes and happily cast his gaze towards the depths of the forest.

"King Melqart, hideth in such a place... Casting a barrier, he seemeth very wary of me. Hohoho, excellent, that fellow must be injured, but I too, am injured. Let us both rest our bodies, and the one who recovereth fastest will have the advantage."

"As expected, it was you who injured the god Melqart—"

Erica asked respectfully.

Her expression was still stiff, but compared to when she met Melqart just now, much more calm.

This was the second encounter with a true god, and she was showing clear growth from her last experience.

"Correct, and the result was mutual defeat. I was heavily injured and lost over half my divine power. See, all the beasts rampaging over the island, divine power scattered from my body obtained life, and became divine beasts. All save one, hath been vanquished and returned to my body. Hoho, the time I met thee, was when I had recovered half, and feeling tired, I wanted to play around for a while."

On the other hand, Kusanagi Godou—

Was troubled. The appearance was clearly identical to the youth . However, it was definitely not him.

"...Who are you? I already know you are a god, but how should I put it, that—you are definitely not the guy who I was with?"

"Yes, thou art a boy with excellent instincts. True, I am no longer the same as that past self."

A very aloof attitude, and a smile like a god looking down upon life on earth from above. Godou became increasingly certain.

Though very proud, that guy would never look down at Godou in this way.

"So, the game on this island is about to end. Letting King Melqart awaken was worth it, to fight that king, let us determine a victor this time."

"—Letting him awaken?"

Godou frowned at those words he couldn't ignore.

"Yes, I am the [Heretic God] whose essence is the battle for victory. As long as I desire an opponent, wanting an enemy to battle against me, an appropriate adversary will appear. I came to this island because of the intertwined fates of this land and my strongest opponent yet."

I, have long sought defeat.

The youth god smiled as he muttered to himself.

"Like so, whenever I come to an island where a powerful enemy lieth sleeping, I would chant—pray grant me defeat, grant me a strong enemy, grant me a true battle! Thus, there is no choice but to fight King Melqart, rather, I should say it is wonderful."

This youth was the culprit behind the entire incident.

Knowing this, Godou held his breath, this was the fact that Erica found difficult to reveal.

"Pardon my honesty. You belong to the faction of the light, a protector god of justice and the people. I believe this act of violence is inappropriate. Please return to the path of righteousness."

Erica's pleas were like those of a high ranking official advising a king.

But the youth remained smiling like the rosy clouds of dawn, and shook his head.

"A pity, but I cannot do that. Didst thou forget? I am now in the midst of rebelling. True, I was once a protector of light and justice—but in my current state, I am the rebelling god of conflict. Hohoho, boy, the time we played together, it was really interesting ."

The youth narrowed his eyes, staring straight at Godou.

"Not long before, my divine characteristics had all but vanished, so the [Heretic God]'s presence was very weak, a different existence compared to my original self. However, now that the majority of divine power hath been retrieved, it is completely different, I have recovered my original self. I am now the heretic god of war!"

Definitely different from before.

Grander than before, stronger than before, more sacred than before, inhuman—a completely different person. And to have done so many unreasonable things, especially with full awareness.

This was a [Heretic God], a god that resisted the myths created by mankind.

Godou finally understood the meaning it held.

"Hoho, I seem to have spoken too much. That [White Stallion], hath become impatient."

The gigantic beast wrecking the green forest was approaching.

The intruder advancing like a bulldozer, was of course, the [White Stallion].

Its furry hide bathed under the moonlight, gave off a white glow. Thanks to the [White Stallion], Godou could clearly see the surroundings despite his poor night vision.

"Haha, good boy! Coming to offer power for my return!"

The youth's figure vanished.

The handsome body like a delicately crafted statue of a deity had disappeared, turning into a gust of wind.

—A tornado! Godou immediately realized, the sacred wind that he saw twice, that blew the divine beasts into the air. This was one of the youth's divine powers.

Very soon, the gust of wind formed a vortex and became a tornado.

He had to stop him quickly, that youth—though their time together was short, but Godou felt he was obliged to stop the god whom he considered his friend. But what could he do, Kusanagi Godou was just a powerless fifteen-year-old mortal. What should be done!?

Erica cried out at this time.

"Godou! Kusanagi Godou! The [Secret Tome of Prometheus] is gathering powerful magic!"

The first time she called out his full name.

However, rather than noticing that, Godou even more quickly reached his hand into his backpack, and took out the stone tablet.

Thinking carefully, this was nothing worth worrying about. Kusanagi Godou's power, technique, knowledge, none of them could ever surpass a god.

Even if there was something that could, it was what the youth called the stone tablet to "steal god's power."

But something that the genius witch Erica could not use, could Godou use it after all?

Not just a figure of speech, but when his hand grabbed the stone tablet, Godou felt scorching heat, as if he had put his hand into a fire.

Enduring the high temperature, he maintained his grip and the stone tablet suddenly gave off light.

Taking the carving of the man on the stone tablet—most likely a depiction of Prometheus, and aiming towards the tornado and [White Stallion]. These actions were done subconsciously.

In that instant, the grimoire from the age of the gods spewed out blue flames.

"Eh—I... I used it successfully... right?"

Even Godou himself was doubtful, and motionlessly stared at the flames.

The tornado transformed from the youth immediately evaded the flames.

But the flames surrounded the strong and vigorous body of the [White Stallion], successfully devouring it. After burning for ten-odd seconds, it disappeared immediately.

Along with the flames, the tall and massive body of the [White Stallion] also vanished without trace.

The result was, over a process of roughly thirty seconds, the blue flames and the [White Stallion] disappeared from the ground.

At the same time, the weight of the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] had increased. The heat Godou had been enduring also stabilized , becoming a gentle warmth.

—Sun.

Suddenly, the image of the sun's brilliance and white flames entered Godou's mind.

Could this be the divine power possessed by the [White Stallion], why would a white horse be related to the sun?

"...Hmm, thou hast figured out how to use this piece of stone? A little troublesome."

The wind swirled back, forming the figure of the youth god in its center.

"Fine, losing just one incarnation will hardly affect me—my divine power hath mostly been retrieved... Boy, thou shouldst be punished for opposing a god, but for the sake of our brief friendship, I shall forgive thee once."

The youth showed a smile.

Not the ancient and elegant smile, but the joyful and resolute grin of seeing a new interloper.

"Let me remind thee, there is no second time. If thou usest this stone to obstruct me, I shall reward thee accordingly next time. Thou mayst be excused!"

Having said this, it meant that he would not give Godou or Erica any further warnings.

Looking straight into the depths of the forest, he advanced with a powerful pace.

However, at that instant—

The tree trunks suddenly swayed, and the trees in the forest fell down one by one, blocking the path of the youth god's advance.

With originally no road leading to the depths of the forest, it was now even harder to get there.

From the palm of the youth god, lightning was suddenly released.

Under normal conditions, his single attack should have burned a tree to ash.

But the tree was completely unharmed. The tree barrier that blocked entry into the forest, did not show a single trace of being burnt, and continued to bar the way.

"King Melqart's barrier, looketh like he is very wary of me. Without any preparation, impossible to barge right in."

The youth god smiled wryly and began to yell at the depths of the forest.

"Fine, ancient king! I shall wait for thee until dawn! Once I store enough power to slice through thy city walls, I shall return!"

Finishing the strong declaration of war, his form dissipated.

Transforming into strong wind in the air.

The last Godou heard was the youth's loud laughter of " hahahahaha!"

Chapter 6 - His Name is Verethragna

Part 1

Not far from the Nuraghe sa Bastia.

Though there were public infrastructure roads, it was basically an uninhabited wilderness.

It was after midnight, and after encountering Melqart and the youth god, Godou and Erica did not return to town.

"Prometheus is a god appearing in Greek myths—the last of the Titans. His name means 'one who considers the future,' in other words, he is a sage with forethought."

Godou listened carefully to Erica's recounting of the myths.

The two of them had made a fire for warmth. Perhaps the surroundings were too quiet, so the only sound was the cracking sound of wood burning.

"He's called Prometheus, right, the god who shared fire with humans?"

"Yes, Zeus the king of the gods did not want to give too much wisdom to humans, but Prometheus felt compassion for their foolishness, and stole fire from the heavens."

This god gifted fire to humans. Obtaining fire, human civilization advanced rapidly.

"As punishment, Prometheus was chained high on the peak on the Caucasus, and had his liver eaten by an eagle. As an immortal god, his body restored itself every sunset, and then the eagle came the next day to eat his liver again. In other words, he must suffer eternal torment."

"What sick torture..."

"In the end, Prometheus was saved from suffering by Heracles, and then became the trusted advisor of Zeus, so it looks like he didn't want any more hardship."

Godou seems to have heard this myth before.

"By the way, Heracles is also a god closely linked to Melqart."

"Why? Isn't Heracles a Greek god... or should I say hero?"

"Didn't Lucretia mention before, on this island not far from Greece, Melqart was depicted as a giant wielding clubs."

The Greek hero, who completed the twelve tasks, was intimately linked to the Phoenician divine king.

To elucidate the confused Godou, Erica continued explaining fluently:

"Greeks who knew the myth of Melqart combined their hero with the guardian god of Tyre. No, more correctly, it was due to

the myth of Melqart and Baal that the legend of the hero Heracles was born. By the way, Baal's weapons are the magic clubs named Yagrush the Chaser and Ayamur the Driver."

Wearing a lion's pelt and wielding a club was the great rough hero Heracles.

Wielding magic clubs with vigorous battle spirit was the hero god Melqart.

Ancient Mediterranean peoples named the promontories flanking the Strait of Gibraltar as 'Pillars of Hercules.' Other than the Phoenicians, there doesn't seem to be anyone else who could have reached there...

"That's so amazing, to think myths were related everywhere."

Towards Godou's exclamation, Erica said:

"Well, no matter what, these are just framework stories born from mankind—fabricated, everything is born from the most primitive stories, and then stealing or be stolen, taking form from all sorts of influences, finally crystallizing into myths."

"I see—then back to the topic of Prometheus, so this stone tablet's advantage is the ability to steal a god's power?"

"He is the god who deceived gods—in other words a master of trickery, there is also a myth like this."

Seeing Godou take out the [Secret Tome of Prometheus], Erica quietly answered.

Dividing a sacrificed ox between gods and humans, Prometheus prepared two plates. Concealing the meat and the entrails within the stomach on one plate; masterfully decorating the bones with glistening fat to make it appealing on the other. He then had Zeus choose—

The result was Zeus chose the bones. After learning he was deceived, Zeus was very angry.

"So, Godou, when the [White Stallion] disappeared just now, it was clearly the divine power of Prometheus. In other words, you activated the grimoire at the time. Do you have any idea how?"

"About that, I think it was just by chance."

He was able to take the divine power of the [White Stallion] even faster than the youth god—no, one should say that the one who stole divine power was [Secret Tome of Prometheus].

The one who doubted Erica's suggestion was the one who did it himself.

"Fine, then let's confirm it?"

Erica took out a cellphone from her shirt pocket.

"—Lucretia? I am Erica Blandelli. Can you tell us about the grimoire? Don't play dumb any more, Godou has already activated its power. Sigh, why would I deceive you, why don't you confirm with him directly?"

Godou was just wondering who she was calling, and never expected the conversation to be passed to him.

When did she ever ask for Lucretia's phone number? This made Godou very surprised, or did she make use of the investigative abilities of the strange secret associations, obtaining personal information without consent?

The latter was most likely. Just as Godou imagined rude behaviors, Erica suddenly handed the phone to him.

No other way. Prepare yourself and pick up the phone.

"I was really shocked. I didn't expect a Level One newbie to notice how to use that item."

"Actually I didn't notice it. It seems like when I wanted to use it, it happened, but Lucretia-san, you are clearly a witch, haven't you been contaminated by modern civilization?"

"Choosing convenience is human nature, that's not my fault. In my home I have a computer to go on the internet, and most of my shopping is done online. I also use air conditioning and refrigerators. My digital camera is made in Japan. What else would you like to complain about?"

Though the dialogue content was extremely mundane, Lucretia Zola's voice remained aloof.

"I already know it is a stone for stealing divine power. However , I am completely baffled why I can use it. Can you explain this point in greater detail to me?"

"Oh that, the reason is nothing special. A grimoire related to deceit and theft, the only people capable of using it are those who have had longer contact and frequent conversations with the target god."

"Deceit?"

"Yes, when I used that grimoire in Japan, I spent a whole night chatting with the god who was causing trouble. I had to listen to him complain about his hate and suffering, so I seized the opportunity and stole the guy's divine power as soon as possible, turning him into an empty shell. However that was only possible because he was a comparatively weak deity. Thereafter, I had the grimoire venerated there, to prevent the god from reviving."

"So that's why..."

The chance to successfully steal divine power from the youth god and Melqart was extremely small.

Godou nodded in agreement with Lucretia's words.

"By the way, I wanted to remind you. It's best if you do not use the stored divine power. For humans it is far too powerful. If used,

it could cause the brain and the entire body's blood to boil. An extremely painful death. The user before me also died like that. I am not deceiving you."

"Yes... I will definitely not use it. Thank you for your valuable information."

"Oh, one more thing, opposing gods of Melqart's caliber is impossible with just the power absorbed in the grimoire, so do not do anything rash!"

To think this kind of warning would be said.

However, Godou did not thank her for this warning. Perhaps because he had already made his decision, he could not utter insincere thanks as that would betray her concern for his safety.

...Lucretia was more sensitive than imagined.

"Young man, are you or both of you considering something? I will repeat myself, do not act too rashly!"

"To be honest, that is impossible. There will be a great disaster if we let things develop without taking action. If I didn't act, my conscience will definitely hound me."

"You don't have to reproach yourself, nor do you have to risk your life approaching them. That is survival wisdom."

"I know. Meeting gods repeatedly these two, three days, have left me with deep impressions. When I encountered Melqart, my legs lost strength."

"Even so... You still want to take part in this matter? That's foolish!"

"It's OK, I am fully aware I am doing something foolish. Neither I nor Erica will object to such an assessment."

"You are much more foolish than Erica-san! No matter what, she is a mage and you are just a powerless commoner. The two cannot be compared."

Directly criticized.

However, Godou shrugged and accepted it, she was right.

"However, I don't hate fools. Clever minds will only act according to my calculations, but a fool will sometimes exceed my expectations. Besides, there are fools who displease others, and fools who bring joy. Please don't become the former."

"Yes..."

Though Godou didn't quite get what she meant, it was a sort of compliment?

"Kusanagi Godou, through this incident, you have made me hold you in high regard. I feel you will become a most interesting toy, so do not die in such a place. Same for Erica-san, please do not miss the opportunity for retreat, hear that?"

Lucretia hung up the phone.

It looked like she was finally acting like an elder, and wasn't just someone with a personality problem. Godou felt gratitude towards her, and then briefly reported the conversation to Erica.

"...So that's the situation. Looks like it can't be used as a finishing move."

"However, this is still the only tool that can affect gods—besides , if a battle between gods begins, what will happen to this island?"

Melqart who had declared he will sink the island.

The youth god whose fragments of power easily demolished cities all over the place.

If they had a serious duel, it wasn't something that could be finished in half an hour. Using the entire island as a stage for their deathmatch, this place will likely end up as a wasteland once the match concluded...

As these thoughts entered his mind, Godou clutched his head, feeling a headache.

"However, even with me plus the [Secret Tome of Prometheus], and all the magi on the island, nothing can be done... So the only remaining choice is to stall for time."

"Stall for time? Isn't that something you do when there are reinforcements?"

Seeing Erica's confidence, Godou was confused.

"Actually there is no problem there. In fact, the magi of Sardinia have already contacted Sir Salvatore, who will be arriving in a day or two. We just need to hold out until then."

"Sir Salvatore...?"

Godou remembered, come to think of it, Lucretia also mentioned this name before.

"Yes, the great Salvatore Doni, the strongest knight of our Italy, the Campione possessing the authority of the magic sword. Didn't I mention before? When miracle is piled upon miracle, humans have the possibility of obtaining victory over a god—"

Campione was the title bestowed upon a god-slayer.

Slaying a god and then usurping the god's authority, they become the devil kings of the human world, fighting against gods.

Hearing that, Godou felt greatly surprised.

That youth and Melqart could probably kill a normal person with just a little finger. To encounter a god and live was already extremely lucky, defeating a god was absolutely ridiculous.

"Gods are such strong existences, are there really people who have fought and won!?"

"These people are rare of course. In fact, there was a period over a century long when no Campiones were born. However during the nineteenth and latter half of the twentieth centuries, a number of people emerged, concentrated during this time, and there are

now a total of six. With the increased frequency in the current period, it kind of feels like the coming of the end of the world."

"Uh, this isn't winemaking, to have these kinds of periods..."

Sir Salvatore who was mentioned, was the sixth Campione born a few years ago.

Since the entire affair was too far removed from common sense, Godou was stupefied.

"Anyway since that has been prepared, we just need to focus on stalling. Even for me, I'm not stupid enough to want to become the seventh Campione."

Godou nodded at Erica's words.

Definitely an idiot. Fighting a god was truly stupid behavior, and for a devil king Campione to win in such a match, how strong a monster could they be?

"However, buying time is also very difficult, what do you have in mind?"

"The current target is the sword god. Since that deity's power has recovered ninety percent, if we can lower it to seventy or eighty, he will be forced to fight Melqart with caution."

"How did you get numbers like ninety and eighty?"

"Because the war god has a total of ten incarnations. One of them, the [White Stallion] is already captured in the grimoire, so it's ninety percent. Isn't that a simple calculation?"

"Right... That guy's name, can you tell me?"

Godou suddenly raised this question, for he had become very bothered by it from a while ago.

Erica calmly said a name lightly.

Hearing this incredible name for the first time, Godou could only wonder, what country does the name come from?

"That's mostly likely the god's name. From the strange occurrences on this island, combined with the information from you, I deduced that, so there should be no mistake."

"...The god with that name, I've never even heard of him."

"Well, most people would think that. Though very trivial, he is still a guardian god of a surviving religion. Amongst the faiths in western Asia, a powerful god with many strong feats—then next is ..."

A sword suddenly appeared in Erica's hand.

Just as Godou wondered what she was going to do, the sword pointed directly at him.

"At this stage, you don't have to carry my luggage any more. Leave the grimoire here and return to Japan obediently. I don't need someone to drag me down any more. If you dare say no, I will take care of you directly with this sword, hear that?"

Suddenly threatening him, but this was just her show of concern. An act to protect Godou even if it meant breaking her oath as a knight. Which is why Godou could not obey.

"A person who hasn't spent enough time with him cannot use the stone tablet. Didn't Lucretia-san say that? I don't think you will be able to use it successfully, so it's best that I stay here."

"This kind of problem always has a solution, you don't have to worry."

"How can it be done?! No matter how I think about it, the next time that guy returns will be to duel with Melqart. You absolutely have no time to spend chatting with him."

"If there's none, I will create an opportunity. Anyway, I have no need for an amateur like you to stay and help me."

No matter what, she would not agree.

If it was the second morning after encountering the [Boar], had she threatened him like this, Godou who feared swords would likely have given her the [Secret Tome of Prometheus].

But now was different, he could not do that.

Though Erica was a willful and unreasonable girl, she was also chivalrous, talented at socializing, and unexpectedly considerate of others. On the other hand, she was also a girl who despaired when met with setback.

Having understood her, it was impossible for Godou to return alone.

Since there was also a guy straying from the right path and causing great chaos, Godou cannot leave that guy alone either.

The two of them faced each other silently for quite a while, until Erica finally shrugged and sighed:

"Fine, if you are prepared to follow me wherever I go, then accompany me. In return, I will really use you, so be prepared!"

Of course, this was exactly what Godou wanted.

Part 2

The rays of dawn began to appear in the eastern sky.

Bathed under the light, the [Wind] incarnation transformed into the figure of the [Youth].

The black-haired youth god landed lightly on the ground, at the moment of dawn just as he promised. He possessed divine qualities with deep ties to light.

Before his eyes was the green forest surrounding the ancient ruins.

As the rays of sunlight bathed the deep green trees in the forest, a rose colored glow was given off.

—Belonging to the faction of goodness, having the god of light as his core, the youth's divine power was raised to the maximum when bathed under the rays of dawn. In this state, it was possible to break the forest barrier.

Actually Melqart was also a deity controlling the sun, but his responsibilities ruled over too many things.

Due to that, he couldn't raise his divine power even when the sun came out, so the youth prepared to make use of this advantage .

—Perhaps it was acceptable to make things simple and wait for the divine king to recover completely.

However, he dispelled this notion as quickly as it surfaced, deeming it too disrespectful.

As the one who held all victory in his hands, it would be a most special occasion to fight the great and ancient divine king, and win . With utmost respect, he will make the most of this opportunity.

The corners of his lips slightly rising, he walked towards the forest with the youth's form.

Though he possessed the power of ten incarnations, this was his most normal state.

Not simply a human, but the form of a fifteen-year-old youth.

Whenever he set forth to correct the wrongs of the world, tasked by his master to conquer opposing enemy gods, he liked to take on the appearance of a youth.

A glorious fifteen-year-old youth.

According to the precepts of the religion that he guarded over, it was the symbol of the 'hero.'

Just like last night, the branches of the trees distorted themselves like snakes to block his path.

Faced with such obstructions, he simply gave the command of ' dismissed.'

The spell words of blessing and domination, this was the authority possessed by the youth incarnation as the hero. The trees of the forest instantly returned to normal plants, and opened up a path.

Next was the attack of the locust army.

For one who was a match for the divine king himself, divine beasts or messengers of god like locusts were no match at all. He instantly used the spiritual power of the eighth incarnation, the [Goat].

This intelligent divine beast was worshiped by nomadic tribes as the embodiment of lightning.

Releasing a lightning strike from his hand, the entire locust army was completely incinerated.

"King Melqart, dost thou believe such obstructions can stop me?
"

Roaring towards the sky.

There was an instant reply.

'Of course! God who slays gods, the great god of the warrior. Those fellows are merely guards. For that level of guards, how could they halt the advance of the war god?'

What appeared next was a violent windstorm blowing forth from in front.

Melqart was also a god of storms, even for the powerful [Wind] that could blow away cities where humans lived, it was a draw. Wind was unable to blow apart wind.

...After that, they used all sorts of divine power.

Such as an army of the dead summoned from the underworld, violent waves that could wash everything away like a flood, or thousands of thunder-strikes that flew like spears in the sky.

The youth god defeated all these attacks, and finally arrived at the Nuraghe sa Bastia.

'Ch... Still capably fighting by switching forms. How vexing!'

"By the power of transformation, I hold victory in my hands no matter what battlefield. Hahaha, King. I can feel thy presence before me. Art thou not coming out? It seemeth, thy divine power hath yet to fully recover!"

He surveyed the surroundings of the ruins as he conversed with Melqart's voice.

The original location of the entrance to the underground temple was now under a massive rock.

'Even for your divine power, this rock cannot be easily destroyed. This is the ultimate palace I ordered the craftsman Kothar-wa-Khasis[27] to construct in the past. In order to stop you, I used this defense. Remember to thank me!'

"Yes... I see, though very crude, it is not bad!"

The youth god was admiring this sturdy rock. As expected of the ancient divine king and god of war, he did not take defense lightly.

However, this was the warlord who could defeat any god or demon.

In terms of pure skill of the warrior, he was a deity surpassing Melqart. His praising of the rock did not imply he couldn't smash it—just as he made his decision, he noticed.

It was only a minute presence.

For a powerful god, it felt like the owner of minuscule magical power.

"Thou hast come. I already stated, the next time thou obstructest me, I shall reward thee accordingly, dost thou remember?"

The youth god turned around and received a smile from her in return.

The beautiful blonde witch wielding Cuore di Leone, the girl was standing there in her red battle outfit.

"I remember your words clearly, but I am a knight, and cannot let you do as you please in this world—if I am not moved despite my knowledge, it would be a taint to my honor."

Erica retorted quietly.

The youth god had decided on the moment of dawn himself.

In order to pursue him into the forest, Godou and Erica had come to the ruins. As agreed beforehand, Godou concealed himself , preparing to use the [Secret Tome of Prometheus].

Waiting for Erica to draw the attention of the youth god.

If the grimoire was used directly, he would likely dodge it. The blue flames that stole divine power—though it struck the [White Stallion] directly, the youth god easily evaded. If Godou tried it again, the result will be the same.

Thus Erica must force him to show an opening.

"Do you still remember our first promise the first time we met?"

Erica asked with a smile as beautiful as spring.

Like a noblewoman happily chatting away at a salon, she had very elegant smiling expressions and mannerisms.

However, maintaining this state was hard work. Her opponent was a god, one misstep and it would turn into a repeat of what happened with Melqart. Erica did not want to suffer that kind of humiliation again.

Wishing to resist a god and counterattack, one definitely could not lose in spirit. Erica Blandelli will never bow down to an enemy without a fight! She will put her life on the line to make her opponent listen.

"Hoho, what promise?"

"Didn't you say, one day you will challenge me to a duel of swords? So, let me make a gamble—if I obtain victory by the sword, you must leave this island, please."

Bowing her head respectfully, Erica made her request. How would the youth god react?

Accept or ignore? If the latter, then she would be forced to try the next option. What would be the result?

"Haha! Thou darest to use a sword to challenge me, the war god . Yes, very well! Thy will is truly courageous, a rare specimen of a witch with a warrior's spirit!"

As expected, the war god agreed, just as she heard from Godou.

Erica laughed to herself. I, have long sought defeat. No matter what kind of opponent, I will never be defeated. From all his grand statements, his overconfidence was glaring, and the provocation succeeded!

"So, I must prepare a sword... Ah, this will do."

Looking over the ground, the youth god picked up a tree branch.

The same length as Erica's Cuore di Leone, but very slender, even a child would likely snap it in two with ease.

"Yes, perfect in length. This will do."

The youth god laughed in mockery as he swung the branch.

A simple ten centimeter slash, but the sword-like wind was like a tornado despite the fact it was such a thin and light branch.

This must be what are known as divine skills. Just from that one attack, Erica understood the youth god's skills.

Once martial arts reached the highest pinnacles of skill, the size and weight of the weapon no longer mattered.

To use a massive weapon perfectly, one must learn the techniques to wield it with speed and precision. In order to use a small and light weapon perfectly, one must learn how to make strong and heavy attacks with it.

"Cuore di Leone—steel possessing the name of the lion king. I now command you. Cast off the disguise I bestowed upon you, and reveal your true form. Appear before me as the lion, and fight by my side!"

Erica chanted the spell words, unsealing her beloved sword.

The previously slender sword was a temporary form chosen for Erica to train herself. A self-applied restraint to develop hard hitting attacks with a light and slender sword.

Cuore di Leone began to expand.

The heavy body of the blade like an anchor, its length was roughly double compared to before.

A wide single-handed sword that did not match the girl's slender wrists.

This was the original form of the lion's magic sword.

Then Erica summoned in her left hand a circular infantry shield made of steel, its red surface carved with the crest of a black cross.

If Erica did not use magic to enhance her strength and explosive force, she would be unable to use these heavy armaments.

"Good. It looketh like thou art ready. Let us begin!"

The youth god announced cheerfully with a smile.

Erica charged without hesitation.

Using a light and slender sword all along was to develop a sense of heavy impact in her sword skills. Then conversely, what was the secret to using a heavy sword? —Speed as well as steady control.

Erica lightly waved her right arm.

From the shoulder to the elbow, and then combined with the force from the wrist, she swung that heavy and solid Cuore di Leone, slashing towards the youth god horizontally.

From her shoulder to the tip of the sword, it was like a whip.

For a human opponent, even a first class swordsman, this sort of move would be very difficult to figure out when seen for the first time.

It was also extremely powerful. In its true form, Cuore di Leone was sharp enough to cut through concrete, not to mention the additional impact produced by the overwhelming weight.

—But even against such an attack, the youth god easily blocked with the slender branch.

Not only that, he slashed back... Correction, the youth god simply swung the branch lightly and Erica took the impact with the steel shield on her left, but the impact of the twig actually made her left hand tremble.

Enduring the pain, she smashed the shield towards the body of the youth god.

A rough tactic combining offense with defense. Erica aimed at the armor on the youth god's feet, stepping hard with her left foot! Her talents were not limited to the magnificent motions of her skill with the slender sword.

The real techniques of the Copper Black Cross, were not only magnificent in appearance, but had many practical tactics in real combat.

Driving these moves, Erica rapidly attacked without pause.

But the youth god simply evaded these attacks by stepping left and right.

And sometimes he would use the little branch to make counterattacks to weaken the momentum of Erica's offense. He was almost dancing like a butterfly and stinging like a bee.

"Little lady! Thou hast trained well! If thou continuest, one day thou wilt become a strong warrior. Amazing!"

He was even able to praise his opponent like that.

Completely treating it as a game, but no matter, Erica had expected he would act like that from the start.

Erica fought as she waited for the opportunity.

Deliberately choosing a competition of swords, and using Cuore di Leone's true form to fight at full strength, these were all in preparation for the next step.

She prayed that the youth god did not have divine powers of prediction or mind reading.

And then Erica finally used her ultimate move.

"Magic sword of the lion, abandon your sword body and transform into binding chains!"

As the sword and the twig clashed repeatedly, Erica suddenly jumped backwards.

At the same time chanting the short spell words, her beloved sword began to transform.

Not into knight's weapons of sword and lance, but an iron chain roughly three meters in length. This iron chain also had a heavy weight on one end, and Erica swung it at the youth god's ankle.

Intending to entangle his two feet and make him fall down.

"Hahaha, to think thou hadst some kind of plan."

Towards such a move, the youth god only smiled and jumped to evade.

But Erica threw out the second chain, this time transformed from the shield in her left hand.

It was deflected by the twig.

However, in that instant Erica had closed the distance and approached the youth god.

The chain in her right turned back into the massive sword—Cuore di Leone's original form, and slashed directly. In midair about to land, the youth god was hit by her full attack.

Fresh blood instantly flew all around.

Previously infused with spell words, the lion's magic sword had hacked off the god's right arm.

—At that very instant, the blue flames of the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] blew forth, as if devouring Erica along with the youth's body.

Part 3

Diverting the youth's attention with a sword challenge.

And then using the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] at this time, was the battle plan proposed by Erica.

"...In other words, an attack that you will be caught up into? That's no longer a fight but suicide tactics."

Godou felt deeply against it.

"You're nagging too much. This kind of deception is the only way to battle a god. Since the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] steals a god's power, it won't have any harmful effects on me. Amongst all the strategies I came up with, this is the best choice."

"But, if you lose in about ten seconds, then everything is over."

"Of course I know that! But there is no other way, aiming the grimoire at him directly will never hit!"

In the end with no other method, Godou could only follow Erica's instructions.

Then she fought with all her might. The youth god underestimated her and fought with a cavalier attitude, resulting in getting his arm hacked off.

In that instant, Godou had already held the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] in his hands without thought.

The heat from the stone tablet was already testing the limits of his endurance. The blue flames shot out all at once, successfully capturing the youth god.

Rushing forth, as if flying straight to the heavens, the mysterious blue flames that burned spectacularly.

Erica walked out of the vortex and stood beside Godou.

Asking if she was fine, she immediately answered 'no problem.' But from the pallor of her face, she was clearly forcing herself. The swordfight with the god must have been more mentally taxing than expected.

"I'm fine here, Godou, you have to watch the flames carefully. Steal power from that deity quickly, and absorb his divine power to the maximum limits of the grimoire!"

"Ah, yes." Hearing Erica's directions, Godou nodded.

To be honest, he didn't even know how much divine power could be stored in this strange tool, and it kept feeling like it could absorb more.

Then Godou began gazing at the flames, but at the instant he noticed the youth god within them—

"Using the mystic stone of Prometheus, as expected."

The youth god's voice sounded, still relaxed and composed.

"You guessed it?"

"Yes, is this not inevitable? The one trump card ye possess, effective against me, is this mystic stone alone. What remaineth are simply the questions of how and when."

"Even if it was expected, it's too late, unless you have a way to escape that cluster of flames—"

Conversing with the youth in the flames, Godou gradually felt unsettled.

If he had a way to escape.

Last night, Erica seemed to have mentioned. He was the war god who smashed every obstacle.

If that was truly the case, could it be—

"I now decree in my name, ancient sage Prometheus."

The youth spoke in gentle tones:

"Fearest me, and quickly dismissest thyself, Prometheus. I am the one who shall defeat all obstacles, whether the mighty or the unjust, neither can conquer me."

Suddenly, the number of lights increased.

Shining with golden splendor were ten, twenty spheres of light—close to a hundred were flying in the surroundings of the flames.

Furthermore, the blue flames began to die down.

The slender youth's figure appeared once more, illuminated by the golden light surrounding him.

"Fearest me, Prometheus! Fearest me and my mighty name! My name is Verethragna! The guardian of light and the holy land! Fearest Verethragna, Prometheus!"

It was finally said. The name finally appeared.

The name meaning 'the one who smashed obstacles,' the sacred name that could not be uttered carelessly, and the name that Erica and Godou deliberately avoided as a god's taboo.

Wind, bull, white stallion, camel, boar, youth, raptor, ram, goat, as well as the human warrior wielding the golden sword.

The ever victorious war god who possessed ten incarnations—his name is Verethragna.

"Speech is light. Spell words are light. So light and spell words, become my sword, form into my blade!"

Before dawn, Erica had mentioned.

The ancient Persian warlord, the protector serving the god of light, Mithra.

Called the protector of the light in western Asia, he had the same origins as Indra the thunder god in India.

In Japan there was Vajradhara[28], and had links to both eastern and western civilization. Also thought to be Heracles by some, Verethragna's current battle against Melqart can be considered the showdown between ancestor and descendant.

Yes, he was a war god without the distinction of being oriental or occidental, the ultimate war god descended upon the earth.

Verethragna was surrounded by a vast amount of light, giving off spectacular radiance.

"I recognize thee, Prometheus. Thy place of punishment, is the summit of the Caucasus. Thou art the god of fire once; thou art the god of theft once; thou art a hero once!"

As Verethragna spoke softly, the dancing lights multiplied intensely.

At the same time, the flames disappeared.

"I, Verethragna am the sword—the hero of might. However, thou art the hero of wisdom, granting fire to the foolish humans—the sage who taught civilization, the prankster who deceived gods through wisdom, the sun and shadows watching over the human race, similar to Amirani[29] of the Caucasus and Loki of the far north."

The golden light seemed to surpass the sun's brightness.

The grimoire's flames completely dissipated.

"How could this be... The golden sword's true form actually consists of the spell words for severing a god's power."

Erica explained beside Godou with a face full of surprise.

"Spell, spell words?"

"Yes, wasn't Verethragna describing what kind of god Prometheus was just now? Those are not simply explanations of knowledge, but spell words carrying magical power—basically a weapon to slash apart another deity once he understands what kind of god he was up against. In other words, it is a spell that can be called the sword of wisdom."

In other words, this was probably the true identity of the shining light that sliced up the [Boar] at Cagliari, and the golden sword that defeated the [Goat] and the [Raptor] at Dorgali.

And now if the [Secret Tome of Prometheus]'s power was ineffective against the youth god—

Then there was nothing left to stop the war god.

Godou looked with fearful eyes at the one whom he had spent a short but happy time together, the youth war god, and the god named Verethragna— With his usual rosy dawn-like smile, he gazed down at Godou.

Yes, though standing on the same ground, he was clearly despising humans, looking down from the perspective of the absolute power and victory.

"I have fulfilled one promise, but now there is another—punishing ye accordingly."

Declaring this with a haughty attitude, Verethragna's right arm regrew in an instant.

Erica took out her sword once more, and prepared her stance.

"What art thou afraid of, I am not going to take both ye lives. But ye resist with such deceit, most vexing... Ye shall receive my blessing, my might and authority! Obey my command!"

—What was this! Godou was completely shocked.

His knees bent down by themselves. His body knelt at the youth automatically and performed the greeting rites of a subject towards a king! What kind of power was this!?

Looking carefully, Erica beside him was also bending her knees.

It was just their bodies losing control, their expressions and their hearts still belonged to them, and the two of them looked at each other.

"Godou, pull yourself together! This is the [Youth]—Verethragna's divine power as the hero! The spell words were for protecting us humans, but in return, we become his servants... Resist his command quickly!"

Erica instantly warned.

She seemed to be struggling to resist, preventing herself from kneeling.

Due to her opposition, Erica's posture returned to normal.

Raising her sword once again, she pointed it at the youth with all her strength.

"Hohoho, witch, force thyself not. Or else, there will be repercussions."

The youth was laughing.

Forcing others to serve him, he was very happy, laughing with innocence.

"Aaaaaaaahhhh!"

Erica's painful screams were suddenly heard, and she fell over.

About to kneel down, Godou noticed the strange state of her ankles. Her ankles were bent at an unnatural angle. This was not a simple injury, it was definitely a bone breaking deformation.

What did the youth do? Godou glared with reproach at the smiling youth god.

"I cannot be blamed, boy, the reason is due to me, but I did not act directly. It was the girl who was far too stubborn, and broketh her own body. Pain would be avoided if my commands were obediently obeyed."

Erica's slim body had fallen over.

Her ankles bent at an impossible angle. Her beautiful face distorted by pain. Her blonde hair soiled by dust and earth.

Casually viewing everything, the handsome but inhuman youth—no, it was the profile of the [Heretic God] Verethragna.

In the instant Godou saw all this, it felt like something broke.

The enemy was a god, but so what?

Gods were impossible to defeat. Was it really true? With so many openings, taking battle so lightly, treating enemies so severely, was there really no way to defeat the completely changed guy before Godou's eyes?

No such thing.

How could there be such a thing!

...Godou slowly but effortlessly stood up. He no longer felt the dominating power of the hero. Perhaps it was seeing Erica suffering that caused this.

"Boy, how incredible. Is this also the power of Prometheus? How didst thou escape from the shackles of my spell words?"

"How could I know this kind of thing, but the reasons behind it—I have some idea."

Godou glared at Verethragna head on.

He could feel more greatness from the youth he met in Cagliari despite the fact that becoming the current state of heretic Verethragna should have better revealed his true power.

"Oh?"

"All you have right now is strong power. Yes, a god stronger than anyone else, but just a willful monster. You cannot be called a hero in this state. I don't consider a guy a hero with just power alone! This is why I don't want to obey, and feel no need to kneel. Any objections?"

Incantations, spell words, the power of language.

Godou simply did not believe in the existence of these things, but now, through clearly articulating his disobedience against Verethragna, Godou's terror was gradually disappearing.

"Only the powerful have the disposition to become heroes, this has been absolute truth since ancient times."

Verethragna made a humorous smile as if mocking a foolish child.

"Thou truly makest me speechless, to think thy obstinacy has resisted my spell words! Though strange it is decidedly a great achievement, praiseworthy."

"No, this is not my power, it is just the fact that you are a hopeless guy."

The god before him definitely prided in his absolute power.

A mage like Erica should be able to calculate his power, and so she would treat as god this monster in the form of a youth, offering her respect to this great existence.

But Godou was neither a mage nor did he have any knowledge about gods.

Which was why he would think this way. That guy before—the one who lost his memory, is the true amazing one. Though he also boasted about not losing in any competition, he would mix himself amongst the crowd, and give off sacred charisma as bright as the sun's brilliance, and would fly like the wind to help those in need.

But now, the god before him was not like that.

This guy only had great power, nothing to be admired, and no one will seek his aid.

"The current you only calls himself a hero, but there is nothing about you that fits that description. So of course, you can't use a hero's power!"

"Yes, I understand what thou art trying to say. Even so, the fact remaineth, I am the undefeated god of victory, dost thou still wish to resist? It is better to obey honestly."

"Oh really? That description of absolute victory, also sounds very strange."

Having started he might as well go all out. With this spirit, Godou clenched his teeth and spoke words that belittled the god.

Since things have come to this, he will resist to the utter end with twisted logic.

Hearing these words, Verethragna furrowed his brow.

...The war god who treated everything with aloofness, showed displeasure for the first time, could this be angering him?

"You have always made light of competition. In your matches against Erica and me, you deliberately let us choose our talents, and played with us. Did you really believe you would win without doubt?"

Unfortunately, Godou had never had a competition where he was assured of victory.

He has always analyzed his enemies, or thought up strategies beforehand based on the capabilities and habits of his future opponents. When necessary, for the sake of victory, Godou has even performed strange tricks that were akin to breaking the rules.

In their junior days, Miura often fell for Godou's tricks as his opponent.

When he came up to Godou after losing so many times, Godou always explained it as "that's not real talent." But that was just

trying to act cool. In fact, Godou was thinking "though that guy has a bit of talent, he's just a simple-minded fool, so I definitely cannot lose to him." That was the situation.

Since he didn't want others to know his obsession with winning , Godou would never reveal these things.

From the perspective of Godou's competitive personality, he definitely cannot approve of Verethragna's cavalier attitude towards competition.

"Even if you are a god, in a thousand matches, your opponent may very well snatch up a victory! The next thing to do is how to lure out this chance of a thousand."

Of course, Verethragna dismissed Godou's words with a laugh.

"Boy, that kind of thing is impossible. Before me, a god, what good would come from hoping for such a rare occurrence? With just a little finger, shall I burn thee to charcoal?"

He was completely right.

But for this once, things are not that certain.

Actually, the finishing move Godou considered as he watched Erica's fight with Verethragna, as well as during his argument with the god, was a strange trick no different from cheating.

No, Godou thought again.

This was not cheating, rather, it's called relying on external power.

"Even so, the fact remains. You are overconfident. Just like now—hey, god! You've seen the power possessed by my stone tablet here!? Next you will take on the role of Erica—the girl just now, and perhaps it will be successful? So grant me power!"

Godou roared angrily at the sky.

The voice heard from the dialogue when Verethragna breached the forest barrier, Godou heard it again, that majestic voice.

'Hahahahahaha! I was expecting some kind of farce and watched quietly! Who could have expected the victorious warlord to fall for a human's tricks!'

The Phoenician divine king Melqart.

His grand laughter reverberated across the sky and the forest.

'To speak to the king of the gods in such a manner, your wish is too impertinent, boy! But your observation is not bad, so let me reward you a little! Verethragna, your most troublesome ability is that [Sword], but can it become a weapon that can slay Prometheus and me, two gods at the same time?'

Suddenly, space distorted.

Out flew two clubs.

'Yagrush the Chaser! Ayamur the Driver! Pursuers, the pair of weapons acting on my behalf, chase and drive out the eastern warlord! Show him the power of my wrath!'

"Ch...! That King Melqart!"

Verethragna's handsome face was once again distorted by vexation.

Godou's eyes had allowed him to strike and send innumerable fastballs flying in the past. But at a height beyond his sight, two clubs—Chaser and Driver were rising up in the sky.

One of them approached like lightning from the front, while the other attacked from behind like a flying bird.

Verethragna jumped high and became [Wind], however, the two clubs coordinated as if they knew the precise locations, chasing after the strong wind.

"—Godou! Hurry and use the [Secret Tome of Prometheus]! Before Verethragna chants the spell words to conquer King Melqart!"

Sprawled on the ground, Erica frantically called out.

Godou hurriedly raised the grimoire high, and the diagram depicting the bound Prometheus suddenly sent forth grand blue flames. Probably because it was his third time using it, Godou found it much easier to operate.

"Ooooooooooh!"

The strong wind prepared to use the [Sword], and returned to the form of the youth in midair.

As the blue flames approached, they were instantly intercepted by the golden spheres of light.

However, one of the clubs came flying and directly struck Verethragna on his thin chest armor.

"Ooh!?" Verethragna gave off a painful grunt, and the brilliance of his light spheres dimmed.

'Do you have the power to use the [Sword] simultaneously with other incarnations? Of course the answer is no! Just as you saw through my powers, I too, saw through yours! You broke my barrier just now, and your power is not at full strength! Continuing to consume your divine powers this way, your existence will become precarious! Just like the brat said, you are overconfident, Verethragna!'

"No, this has not ended! My defeat has not been sealed, King Melqart!"

Verethragna yelled at the divine king's thunderous voice.

"The pursuers of Chaser and Driver! These were the weapons given to thee by the god of craftsmen, Kothar-wa-Khasis! As Baal, thou used them to lure the dragon king Yam[30] away from his throne, and slew him! Through this victory, thou ascended to the throne of the divine king!"

Could these also be spell words—incantations produced by the golden [Sword].

Godou held his breath.

Was Verethragna currently exchanging the [Sword] against Prometheus to a sword for Melqart? Even if that happens, the situation is unchanged. There was only one way to reverse the tide of battle, yes.

Dual wielding.

Just as Godou predicted, the golden light gathered upon Verethragna's two hands.

The light gradually concentrated, forming long swords with golden blades, one in each hand.

'Ha, a desperate attack! Haha, that's the renowned Verethragna! Rather than choosing defeat through overconfidence, it is better to fight beyond one's limits. This spirit is excellent, now let me have a good fight against you!'

Melqart's voice bellowed thunderously with glee.

On the other hand, there was already a deep red trail of fresh blood on Verethragna's forehead. His lips still chanting spell words sonorously, the elegant and handsome face had become pale.

Even so, he was still flying in the air wielding two swords majestically.

The two clubs Chaser and Driver flying back and forth, and the blue flames of the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] dancing in the air like a comet.

The battle between gods, was still undecided.

Part 4

Verethragna's twin swords, Melqart's clubs and Prometheus' flames collided in the air.

Down below, Godou hurriedly picked up Erica in his arms as her feet were injured.

"Can you still walk? Please bear it for now. It's very dangerous here, so it'd be best to move to another location."

"Godou... You managed to trick a [Heretic God], what an amazing achievement."

While the gods battled intensely, the two of them entered the forest.

Leaning Erica, who was unable to walk properly, against his shoulder, the two walked side by side.

At last they reached the foot of a great tree.

Setting Erica down, Godou held the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] once again.

Verethragna had the advantage in the air battle due to his weapons that could seal divine power and slay enemies. That should be obvious.

Chaser, Driver and the blue flames were slashed an uncountable number of times.

The youth god achieving victory was likely just a matter of time . However, his flying movements in the air as well as sword speed did seem to be gradually getting sluggish.

"If this continues, it will be very hard for the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] to steal his power."

"How about this—Godou, before Verethragna comes, hurry and escape alone. I'm just a burden to you, abandon me here."

Resting against the tree, Erica spoke painfully.

The exquisite voice with clarity, and the face whose beauty was unaffected by the dust, sand and sweat. It was only now that Godou was finally struck by a real sense of how beautiful this girl was.

"Can you use healing magic? Like those moves commonly seen in games?"

"I can, but it takes a certain amount of time for the spell to take effect. Healing these two legs... Probably would take thirty minutes, so it will be too late."

A technique that could heal these legs which looked like they were snapped, was probably a very powerful spell.

However, it was entirely useless in this situation.

Now, there was only one thing that could be used.

Godou looked at Verethragna's direction with determination, and said to Erica:

"So, the only trump card is Prometheus' stone tablet after all. I will think of a way to be that guy's opponent. Use that magic quickly. Once your legs are healed, we'll run together."

"Don't be stupid! You're going to push Verethragna to that degree! Who knows what kind of divine retribution you will suffer !?"

"However, that guy can transform into the wind, right? If I run away alone, I will be caught eventually. So without you coming along, I probably won't be able to escape."

Godou deeply sighed at this time.

"To be frank, there's no other way other than that move. However—"

"However?"

"Didn't Erica mention before? That guy likes me more. I am also very concerned about him. For a former friend to turn into something like that, it really feels bad to just leave him alone and do nothing."

Though their time together was short, Godou felt as a friend that the youth has strayed from the right path.

What could he do—no idea.

Even with wounds all over his body, the powerful warlord continued to fight with great spirit.

What could he do—no idea.

Even so Godou had to stay and witness the final moment, this feeling was very real.

"You really... Are a true idiot?"

"I completely cannot deny that. When you say stuff like that now, I can only accept them all."

Faced with the admonishing from the witch and the female knight, Godou replied with gentleness instead.

Erica stared at the sky as if she had given up, sighing briefly.

"Idiot, also a really big idiot, so stupid that you are a hopeless idiot."

"Fine... If it makes you happy, say whatever you like, I don't want to argue anymore."

Unable to awaken Godou from his foolishness, Erica smiled. It was neither a smile of mockery nor pity, but seemed to be mostly carrying the feelings of giving up.

"But amidst all that foolishness, there's a little bit of cuteness... I will ask you one last time, will you change your decision?"

"No, I owe him a favor, so I cannot choose to run."

"...Favor? If so, then so be it."

With a few exchanges, Erica had already realized.

Godou felt very surprised and happy at the same time. Finally able to reach a mutual understanding with this girl, he definitely would never expect this to happen the first time they met.

"Leaving everything to 'so be it,' that is really vexing for us weak humans. No matter what, we have to give the gods some hardship to suffer."

Saying that, Erica went silent for a while, deep in thought.

And then she stared at Godou's face seriously and said:

"We probably forgot, but the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] has stored within it Verethragna's divine power—the ability of the [White Stallion] incarnation, right?"

"Ah yes. I think so. Though it's a power related to the sun, why is it a horse?"

"I will explain that to you later. Listen to me carefully? When you go over to Verethragna, if you feel it is the end, don't hesitate, just use this power as quickly as possible."

Hearing Erica's advice, Godou suddenly stared with eyes wide open.

Wasn't this the move that Lucretia warned 'never to use it.'

"If I do that I will definitely die. Didn't Lucretia-san warn us?"

"If this continues, we're all going to die. But if you try that, perhaps it will become a giant reversal. You know the rules for promotion in chess, right?"

Godou tilted his head in puzzlement, not knowing what Erica was considering.

It was something like a rule that allowed pawn pieces reaching the far rank on the opposite side to be exchanged for a queen or a knight. In terms of Japanese chess[31], there was a similar concept where pieces can promote in the three rows of the opponent's territory.

"Unfortunately, not everything can go smoothly... Your chance of dying is very high, but if successful, the reward is very substantial. Compared to plain sacrifice, there is value in attempting this."

She was showing a most gentle smile.

Like the tiny flower bud of the Australian Red Cedar, a smile like a noble princess. This girl could actually smile like that, how unexpected, Godou felt like he couldn't tear his gaze away.

"Kusanagi Godou, you are a very foolish person, but it is precisely this foolishness that has led you on a path to here. That is the truth. So why don't you join the ranks of the most foolish, as well as the greatest people in the world. I'm not going to ask you to gather your courage, rather, please stick with your foolishness to the very end—understood?"

"Yes, I almost get it... But being called an idiot or foolish by you all along, somehow feels complicated."

"Ah, I was praising you. A most affectionate nickname of 'idiot' —can't you even feel that? What a slow person."

"I completely cannot feel that. I've never heard of 'idiot' carrying such deep meanings."

Faced with Godou's surrendering, Erica laughed.

"Actually I just realized something, 'Epimetheus' illegitimate children,' another name for Campiones which I explained before. But this description has a strange hidden meaning."

"Epimetheus. Another deity from Greek mythology? That's the feeling I get from the name."

"Yes, you are correct. If we have a chance to meet again, I will definitely explain it to you. So don't hesitate and go for it, Godou, take the path which even the courageous and clever people cannot pass through. The only ones capable of walking upon it are the great fools, I believe you have that disposition."

"...I don't really understand, but I get the message. Thanks for taking care of me. Thank you."

Godou expressed his gratitude for the profound meaning in her words.

Actually, there was an additional reason for approaching Verethragna's side.

If he abandoned this strong yet beautiful girl covered with thorns like a rose, and ran away by himself, Kusanagi Godou will never forgive himself for the rest of his life.

Instead, he preferred to have a showdown against a god.

To leave a girl in need, nowhere felt as good as giving up his body to protect the girl.

Though he had made his decision in his heart, however—

He could not possibly speak out such thoughts. If he said it out, the prideful Erica Blandelli would definitely fight to the last moment even if it meant breaking her own legs.

"Right, wait a minute, Godou. Bend down and lean your ear close."

Was Erica going to give me a new suggestion?

Her elegant poise just now, had become a little bashful—was it something difficult to put into words?

And it has to be whispered?

Puzzled, Godou did as he was told. Slowly moving towards Erica who could not stand up from the pain in her legs, he brought his ear to her lips.

Under such conditions, she still seemed to be hesitating.

"What is it, don't you have something to say?"

"Yes, well... I already said what I wanted to just now..."

"Then why do I have to make this pose?"

"Right, just shut up! I just want to give you a wonderful present!
"

The unexpected attack came just at that instant.

After a period of hesitation, as if suddenly making her decision, she pressed her lips, the color of cherry blossoms, near Godou's cheek, and kissed him.

Smooch...

The soft and light sensation was being transmitted.

Godou's mind suddenly went blank.

A very small, light touch, but the shock was exceedingly great! What was this girl doing!

"Y-You, why did you do that? What was that about!?"

"S-Shut up! To be surprised by something like this! It's just... Right, it's just a lucky charm! It's really rushed, but I believe it is the most useful!"

Embarrassed, Erica's cheeks were bright red.

"The only males I've ever kissed till now, were my uncle and father! So it will definitely be very effective! Show me some gratitude!"

Godou's cheek—no, his entire face felt hot.

His own face was probably all red as well, it couldn't be helped. The day finally came when a beautiful girl would kiss him like this , he never dreamed it was possible.

It was already impossible to look at Erica's face properly.

She frantically turned her body, and Godou rushed forth towards the god who was once his friend.

Nuraghe sa Bastia. At the firmly sealed entrance created by Melqart.

Sliced into halves, Chaser and Driver lied broken embedded in the ground, while Prometheus' blue flames had already died out at some point.

Verethragna breathed heavily, his golden swords no longer in his hands.

He was now in a condition where his body was covered with wounds.

In this state, it was his final direct confrontation with Godou who was wielding the [Secret Tome of Prometheus].

"Boy, I must say thou hast done well. But as thou seest, I have defeated King Melqart's weapons, thy flames have been vanquished, and the only thing that concerns me is Prometheus' mystic stone. Makest haste, givest that to me."

"No way, unless you agree to leave this island. This is the last trump card of us humans, I cannot casually give it up for my own sake."

Godou resolutely resisted the hand extended by Verethragna.

Godou's insistence made the youth sigh audibly.

"A hopeless fellow. To think I, the warlord, would be forced to use divine power against a mere human brat as an opponent, what a waste of time!"

Muttering, Verethragna slowly approached.

His footsteps were heavy, as if extremely fatigued.

Thus his subsequent actions occurred just as Godou predicted. The god in the youth's form suddenly kicked at the ground.

Without divine power, what moves would he make? He could only depend on his body. In the instant Godou realized that, the impact came.

Hit by Verethragna's spinning kick, Godou was sent flying.

Still, it had missed his head. Evading the direct attack was thanks to his well-trained dynamic vision. He also held on to the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] with all his strength, so he didn't let go.

"At this point, aren't you going to use your true capabilities against someone like me? You are still making light of competition ."

"This is not a competition, only punishment for a foolish human who doth not know his place."

It was right, even if it were a competition of martial arts or sports, Godou had no chances of winning.

However, even though he was at a disadvantage, Godou could not let himself be looked down upon.

"Erica told me already, what kind of god was Verethragna—the god who transformed all the time, and could obtain victory no matter the battlefield, right? Originally a god of the warrior ranks of the royal clan, and with rising popularity became worshiped and venerated, finally becoming the protector god of the people and justice, right?"

"Correct, that is my origin!"

This time it was a forward kick that attacked Godou.

Though it did not strike a fatal spot, Verethragna's attack was very vicious.

Feeling an impact that felt like a car crash, Godou was sent flying again, and fell on the ground, his consciousness slipping for a moment.

"Obviously such a great god, but playing around with a brat like me, isn't that kind of strange? When I met you at the pier, it wasn't like that eh? More similar to the sun, worthy of admiration—just as you described. That's right, like a hero!"

"Sayest no more, these are things that happened while I had forgotten my nature as a [Heretic God]. Originally in the myths, I was the son of the sun, the hero guarding the light."

This time it was a palm strike, and then a punch, followed by a karate chop.

Fast attacks that made evasion and defense useless, Godou was being pummeled like a sandbag, getting tossed around like a ball.

His body ached all over, feeling like scorching heat, and there were severe bruises everywhere, perhaps even broken bones.

His consciousness was getting fuzzy, and more importantly, his whole body hurt.

"However, it is all past and gone. Nostalgia will never bring back the past."

Verethragna left those words.

But Godou didn't agree, even considering the current situation, his right hand continued clutching the [Secret Tome of Prometheus]. This was the result of the grip and determination of the fourth hitter.

"Why did you give this stone tablet back to me? The second time we met, why did you let me keep it? Wouldn't it have been better to destroy it back then?"

The scene at Dorgali during that time. Didn't the youth say that in the end?

When the time comes, he must use this for the world.

That was probably a farewell of a lifetime.

In other words, the guy already knew back then, if the incarnations split from Verethragna, those divine beasts were defeated, he would turn back into [Heretic Verethragna] in the future.

—Which is why Godou owed him a favor.

The youth at Cagliari had gotten Godou and the young men at the pier involved together, and played happily.

The youth at Dorgali had used the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] to defeat the [Goat], but didn't expect to have to fight the [Raptor] so soon.

He defeated the divine beasts which had been born from his incarnations, and took back his power as a god.

At the same time retrieving his identity as the [Heretic God], the divine name of Verethragna that should have been sealed, as well as the characteristics of resisting the myths and holding contempt for humans.

In response to Godou's wish, he defeated his split incarnations.

Therefore, that youth no longer existed.

The youth he encountered at Cagliari, then met again at Dorgali , existed no more, and now, before Godou's eyes was only the youth god named Verethragna.

Knowing this would happen, Godou would not have gone to fight when they met for the second time.

And now he understood very well, it was due to Kusanagi Godou's willfulness that he had no choice but to return to the unwanted original form, and very cautiously, saved for Godou the trump card that could cause him pain.

If this wasn't a favor, what else could it be?

Hence Godou had no choice but to attempt to stop Verethragna at all costs, he definitely needs to be stopped!

"Just as thou described, that truly was my mistake. Hohoho, why would I do such a thing... I cannot remember."

"Really? You really can't recall?"

His body covered with wounds, Godou was sprawled on the ground as he questioned the god.

Now he finally understood. What that guy actually hoped for Kusanagi Godou to do and expected from him. The handsome face of the youth god looking down upon humans from above, now bore a little resemblance to that guy before.

"...Hmm. I really cannot recall it, boy, pray forgivest me."

"Who will forgive you? What a forgetful god, I will complain about you on behalf of mankind."

His gaze met with the youth's.

The human youth glared at the quiet eyes of the [Heretic God] who had lost himself.

The attacks had stopped, Godou forced his battered body, and finally stood up.

—Hmph.

Sighing slightly, Verethragna smiled peacefully.

"Hoho, thou art not a bad fellow. If fate had not brought thee to encounter gods, perhaps thou wouldst be living a peaceful life. How unfortunate for thee, boy."

"Yeah that's right. All the fellows I met on this island are weirdos. However, I don't find myself unfortunate."

"Ha, though our opinions differ, even from thy perspective, is that not a bit too contrived?"

Verethragna and Kusanagi Godou.

Just like the time they met the first day at the harbor of Cagliari, the two were chatting.

Only four days has passed, but who could have expected in such short time, the situation between the two of them would undergo such drastic change.

"Though weird, everyone was very interesting. The proud and spoilt genius, whose true nature turned out to be a very gentle

witch; and then there's the lazy old lady who insisted in looking like a youngster."

"Oh?"

"There's more. The amnesiac and overconfident god, this guy is currently causing trouble for others, but still I don't really hate him ."

"Thy life is already held in a god's hands, yet thou darest make such jokes. How disrespectful!"

"If you want me to respect you, then act a little more like a god. Isn't that simple?"

It was no longer a staring contest.

The god and the human's eyes only stared at each other for about ten-odd seconds.

The first to avert his gaze was Verethragna.

"At this point it is impossible. I have returned to my heretic self. In my current state, only meeting with defeat and obtaining new life will I return to the true path of the gods. So, how much time dost thou think it will take?"

Showing a smile like the rosy clouds of dawn, the youth extended his hand.

In it were tiny sparks, like the early signs of lightning.

The direction this hand extended towards, was the youth he once acted together with.

"All you need is defeat? Then, let me give that to you."

Godou's trembling hand raised the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] and aimed it at the warlord.

Responding to the will of the wielder, the stone tablet gradually heated up.

"Stop, boy, a human using a god's power will exceed thy limits, art thou planning to use the divine power of my [White Stallion]? If so, thou shalt die in the end. Obediently handest it over. I shall save thy life if thou compliest."

"Too annoying, to be ordered by a god who brings so much trouble to mankind, how could I do as I'm told!"

"Foolish! If thou attackest me in these conditions, at best thou wilt achieve mutual defeat. Thou art aware?"

"Maybe not—Erica, that fellow who is smarter than me said, this could very well end with a perfect outcome—so I will take a gamble, even though I have no idea about the logic, if there is a chance for success, I will risk everything on this gamble!"

"At the end of thy short human lifespan, to think thou wouldst make such a foolish gamble. Thou art truly a troublesome brat!"

"...My name is Kusanagi Godou. Remember it well."

"What?"

"We've already done all sorts of things together, come on, you should have remembered my name. Just like Erica, you overlooked it? What a rude guy."

The two youths gazed at each other once again.

Looking down from above, the youth god smiled.

The spurned human youth expressed regret for his reluctance to accept things. In the next instant, from the hand appeared lightning, while white flames appeared from the stone tablet.

Mutual defeat. The attacks unleashed by the two youths, achieved exactly mutual defeat.

Part 5

'Hmph, hahahahahahaha. How useless of you, Verethragna. To think the god of victory would meet defeat at the hands of a frail and weak human child.'

"Quiet, King Melqart. Thou art the useless one, to think thou wouldst be used by such a fellow."

—This was the dialogue heard by Godou's hazy consciousness.

His limbs harshly complained to him in pain, while his brain and entire body felt scorching hot.

The backlash from the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] mentioned by Lucretia, the damage received from Verethragna, as well as the final lightning attack, these were probably the full set of causes for the current pain.

Having received so much damage, he hasn't died. How strange.

'Hmph, without the precondition of aligned interests, I would not have agreed to this fellow's proposal. Of course, don't you forget, this fellow and I are about to awaken. For his act of rudeness and not knowing his place, in a moment I will make him suffer well.'

"Awaken?"

'Did you forget, warlord, the curse left behind by the damnable brother and sister-in-law of Prometheus, Epimetheus and Pandora ? The dark birth ritual that gives rise to the child of the fool and the witch, the secret rite that only succeeds when a god is used as a sacrifice! Watch, your divine power is already flowing into this fellow's body and mind!'

"Oh, hohoho, I see. So her goal was this, that witch. A girl that truly cannot be underestimated!"

'What a strange fellow. Laughing after a defeat? Has your brain gone rotten?'

"Thou embarrassest thyself, divine king. 'Tis only one defeat. If this level of setback cannot be accepted, I can only say it is a matter of magnanimity. As my first and last defeat, it feeleth like a good experience! Certainly, there will be no second defeat!"

"Hoho, Verethragna-sama really, truly hates failure."

"Oh, you are—I see. Thou noticed the birth of a new child."

'Pandora, the woman who bestowed everything upon them! You have appeared in person!'

"Ah, divine king-sama, it's been a while. As long as gods and humans are present, I will appear. For I am the witch who brought forth all disasters and a shred of hope, there is nothing to be surprised, right? ...This child is my new son. Hoho, is it painful? Do bear it, this pain is the price for taking you to the highest summit, accept it well!"

A sweet and loving voice could be heard near Godou's ear, gently caressing his head.

Who was the owner of this voice? Was it Erica?

"Then let everyone present grant their blessing and their hatred to this child! The seventh Campione—possessing the destiny of the youngest devil king, please bestow the sacred spell words upon this child!"

'Shut up, witch! Your newborn child, I will bury him immediately.'

"Hoho, very well. Then Kusanagi Godou, I grant my blessing to thee who has been reborn as the new god-slaying king! Thou art the first person to usurp mine—the authority of the god of victory! Becomest stronger than anyone else! Until the day I shall fight thee again, possessest my undefeatable body!"

The healing magic still had not taken complete effect.

That was why Erica Blandelli could only drag her painful right leg to the ruins. Clearly she would have been healed after ten-odd minutes, but she couldn't wait.

"—Godou!"

Seeing the Nuraghe sa Bastia which had become all wrecked by the battle between gods, over there lay a Japanese youth deep in slumber.

Erica breathed a sigh of relief as she saw him safe and sound.

The intense pain from using the divine power stolen by the [Secret Tome of Prometheus], combined with the shock from Verethragna's full strength electric strike, Erica couldn't imagine just how painful it was.

But now, Kusanagi Godou—

Wrapped in tattered clothes, his body had all sorts of injuries including bruises, broken bones and burns, however—

He was sleeping peacefully.

That satisfied and sleeping face no longer had a single wound. As for the other injuries, they would all recover in time... His vitality and recovery had already surpassed humans and approached a level similar to the gods.

"You killed the god, right, Kusanagi Godou... The seventh Campione is born!"

Erica's legs lost strength and gave way as she murmured to herself in a trembling voice.

Watching the sleeping Campione—the face of the youth who lorded over the fate of the world, and would one day become the [King] of the magi and be worshiped, she said:

"You probably don't know, right? The secret ritual to be reborn as a Campione, came from Prometheus' younger brother Epimetheus and his wife Pandora, the incident when the box containing all disasters and a shred of hope was opened."

Hesitating only for a moment, Erica lifted Godou's head.

Normally she would never do something like that, but this was a special reward, because to his credit, he was now the one who has defeated a god.

"Prometheus' name means 'one who thought ahead,' in other words, the sage with foresight. Conversely, Epimetheus means ' one who thought afterwards,' in other words, the fool who only regretted in hindsight after taking action first."

Erica was letting her knees act as a pillow for Godou to lie on, and also took the opportunity to wipe with her handkerchief the blood, sweat and soil from his face.

Erica spoke on the subject of gods.

"Only a fool like you could receive the grace of Epimetheus. A smart person will never fight a god one on one. I should have explained that to you just now. Therefore, Campiones are also known as 'Epimetheus' illegitimate children.' In other words the son of the fool, a most fitting title, you big idiot."

She should take this chance to scold him as much as possible.

Afterwards, were he to become a harsh tyrant, even reproaching him like this would be impossible.

...No, if such a day did arrive, she will definitely be responsible for resisting, for he became born as [King] because of her.

However—

This was an impossible future.

From now on, he will be facing a life of unimaginable conflict and hardship.

Even if he desired peace, but whether the world or the magi, and especially the gods, none of them will leave him alone.

"Fine, this is enough, when the time comes I will accompany you a little longer. I am responsible for your gaining this kind of body, and I am a bit concerned about your affairs. Of course, it also depends on whether you plead for my assistance with sincerity or not."

Erica was talking to herself.

Of course she knew he could not hear, but beginning just now she had a sort of unbelievable feeling, and she didn't want to stay silent.

"So, Kusanagi Godou, hurry and wake up. The Great Knight of the Copper Black Cross, the peerless Erica Blandelli is waiting for you to awaken, oh? I won't forgive you for making me wait, oh?"

However, this voice was extremely soft.

The [King]'s slumber cannot be disturbed. Of course Erica knew it was pointless to do this, but she somehow had an incredible feeling.

Why was she wasting time doing these things?

Whatever... After all, they were just on a whim.

On the long road of life, taking a small detour should have no significant effect on the whole. So the birth of the youngest [King], she will continue observing for a while.

It was at the moment she made her decision.

The triangular hole at a corner of the ruins—the entrance to the underground temple, Erica stared at it with wide open eyes.

The defensive wall of rock erected by the divine king of the Phoenicians had vanished.

On the other hand, appearing in the sky over the hole was a mass of black clouds, surrounded by flashing lightning, and the wind was blowing vortices.

"King Melqart, you have appeared?"

'Hoho, exactly. That brat's rebirth, seems to have concluded peacefully. I can feel the Campione's presence. His body exudes the presence of my enemy, the ancient warrior!'

The divine king's voice could be heard coming from the black shadow.

"So king, are you going to fight the new Campione now?"

'Foolish words! I am the king of the gods, the great warrior, the strongest hunter who slays dragons! How could I possibly do something so despicable towards a newborn little brat!'

Seeing Erica face the black shadow proudly, Melqart's voice began to announce loudly.

'Pass these words to him when he wakes up! Your first enemy was the war god Verethragna, the second one is me—Melqart! Very soon I will recover all my power. When that time comes, take the place of that war god, my spears of fury will be aimed at you! Polish your sword and wait for my arrival!'

Boom! As a gust of violent wind began to blow, the black shadow flew away like lightning.

King Melqart had left the premises.

"That's right, you sure have it rough, to be targeted by that crude god."

Erica shrugged and continued to watch Godou's peaceful sleeping face.

"No other way, I will guard you for a while then. You owe me, and I will make you pay me back well. Even if you are a [King], debts have to be settled. Be prepared, Kusanagi Godou!"

And that concludes the story of the beginning.

The story of the youth who obtained power due to his destiny to slay a god, as well as his encounter with his young lady knight.

Thus ends one scene of the saga. What begins next, is the story of all sorts of commotions brought forth to the world by the devil king and his knight.

Epilogue

In the latter half of July, it was the peak of summer.

For southern Italy, beginning in May was already the warm season for short-sleeved clothing.

So during the peak of summer, the sun's heat was especially intense, and because of that, the seaside resorts were packed with people every single day.

"Young man, after you became a Campione, I had given you my honest advice—"

Under the cloudless Sardinian blue sky.

A beautiful beach, as well as the deep azure ocean extended before his eyes.

This was not a place where he had visited with Erica during spring. Instead this was on the north-western part of the island, a beach near the abandoned silver mines.

Though it was located close to Alghero which had the airport, the beach was not recorded in travel guides.

Currently present were Kusanagi Godou and Mariya Yuri, their host Lucretia Zola, as well as Erica Blandelli with her assistant and maid Arianna.

"Your greatest flaw is that you don't suspect your friends. As a young man, this is admittedly adorable, but you are a real and proper devil king-sama. As both a king and a warrior, how could you be so careless? This is why this happens to you."

The one who explained with such an attitude was Lucretia.

The nostalgic Witch of Sardinia, the chief culprit who caused Godou to become a Campione, the old lady who looked like a beautiful girl in the prime of life.

She was now lying on a mat on the beach, elegantly having sun tan lotion applied on her.

The one applying the lotion was Kusanagi Godou, yes, that's him.

As a side note, the two of them were wearing swimwear, though Lucretia's bikini top had been untied, in other words, she was lying there half-naked.

Applying lotion to her back, Godou had lifeless eyes, and remained silent without speaking a word.

"When backed into a corner, your judgment and decisiveness can be frightening, but I hope you learn to think ahead a little."

As a side note, Lucretia's body was rich with the voluptuous feel of a mature woman.

A bosom possessing overwhelming oppressive presence, a narrow waist despite a very decadent lifestyle, every voluptuous curve of her body surpassed those of Erica's.

Besides, at a height of roughly 160cm, Erica was considered somewhat short amongst Italian women.

By Japanese standards, her figure rivaled swimsuit models, but in her home country, Erica only stood out as a particularly slim and slender girl. However, Lucretia was completely different.

With a height of 170cm plus a bit, and a body that exploded with the sensual beauty of her curves.

That kind of sexy litheness, was like a show girl appearing on European or American television, or comparable to a celebrity sex symbol.

"The first thing you should have suspected, was whether the crafty Erica-san was provoking your wariness on purpose by that kind of proposal. From that moment on, you should have pondered whether it was the beginning of a conspiracy, hey... Keep your hands moving, you need to apply the lotion more thoroughly."

"By the way, Lucretia, isn't it time to return Godou to me?"

With a joyful voice, Erica started a conversation with the half-naked beauty in the middle of her lecture.

Dressed in a black bikini with red patterns and designed for activity, Erica generously exhibited her well-proportioned limbs and tender skin.

"Because you helped out, I lent Godou out for you to command. But the purpose of this trip is to hasten the development of my relationship with Godou, right? That's about enough."

...Kusanagi Godou and Mariya Yuri had arrived at the Alghero airport.

Welcoming the pair were the three of them—Lucretia and Erica, with Arianna standing behind them as their maid.

That's right, everything was conducted within Erica's grasp.

From inciting Godou's sense of emergency with the travel plans at the very beginning, to making the cornered Godou seek help from an acquaintance who was already complicit in the conspiracy .

And just like that, Godou rushed towards a summer vacation island, to this open location.

The plan designed by Lucretia and her secret ally Erica, was perfectly executed to success.

"Godou-san... Did you not say this was your host and savior? Then you should serve her even more earnestly, and with full sincerity, right?"

As Godou serviced Lucretia as she lied down, Yuri's cold voice was warning him.

She was wearing a blue one-piece swimsuit with a mini-skirt design. Even so, the pale complexion of her shoulders clearly gave off a feeling unique to young ladies.

Though a lot of places were covered, it was still a swimsuit.

Yuri's graceful figure was unambiguously displayed. Though her curves lost to Erica and Lucretia by a step or two, they were still extremely pleasing to the eye, and her air of nobility was something wonderful that the other two lacked.

"...Lucretia-san. Umm, it's about time to stop, right?"

Yuri's glance of derision caused Godou piercing pain.

They had been caught at the airport then kidnapped to this beach. Subsequently, Godou was forced into manual labor by the pretext, 'you were invited here specifically so that you must repay the favor using your body.'

Just as he was about to refuse, Lucretia deliberately looked at him from afar.

'I see... By the way, you are a man, so it is natural you would not service an old lady like me, but would prefer the fresh young bodies of Erica-san and the girl you brought here. Hohoho, a fellow who would ditch his friends for his lovers, a fellow who doesn't return favors, you sexual predator... By the way, if you

don't agree to my demands, from now on, I will be calling you sexual predator all the time.'

Due to this convoluted threat, Godou had no choice but to serve her.

"Godou-san. If you don't mind, let me substitute for you?"

The one speaking beside him was Arianna Hayama Arialdi with her very long name. Though she was Erica's assistant, she was basically her maid.

By the way, she was currently wearing an apron over her swimsuit. In a certain sense, it felt like something was reversed.

When Godou asked her 'why wear an apron,' she immediately answered with something like 'but when serving others, don't you have to wear this?' As long as one avoided her driving or any cooking involving stewing, she was a naturally healing female presence.

"Please do give me a hand, Anna-san!"

"Wait a while, young man, this is no good. Arianna, don't get impatient."

"Ah, Lucretia-san, why is that?"

"It feels great to know that the young man serving me hates it. So, young man, do your work with ever more loving care. Besides, this should be nice for you, right? To openly and legally caress the skin of a beauty like me."

"...The one who called herself old was yourself, Lucretia-san!"

Godou protested loudly.

It is almost time to stop, for I am next. Godou knew Erica was thinking that as she laid beside him, and wanted to escape from her. More importantly, the silently watching Yuri's cold sharp glares were like those of a demoness[32], making Godou very terrified.

"How can I harbor such strange thoughts against an old lady from the same generation as my grandfather?! Please do not say these kinds of strange things."

"Hoho, your mouth denies it, but your body is honest. I can feel your fingers trembling on my back, it's OK to be a little more daring, eh? Ah... That's the way, your technique is good, you've already figured out the sensitive spot on my shoulder. Yes, now gently, slowly just like that, don't hurry—ah..."

A seductive atmosphere and subtle sounds were deliberately released from Lucretia's lips.

Unable to stand it, Godou could only surrender.

"I beg you, please could you spare me."

Anyway, that was the seaside in the peak of summer.

Godou casted his mental fatigue aside. Whenever he started playing, he automatically felt full of passion.

Hearing that the locals were gathering for a beach football tournament, Lucretia suddenly suggested joining in.

"I don't mind, let's have fun."

"I see. So, you guys come as well."

Lucretia was ordering him with a matter-of-fact tone of voice, and Godou shook his head.

"Why do we have to join as well?"

"It's a tournament where the winning team gets the luxury prize of a fully automatic washing machine. There is no meaning unless I form a team with our group. For the sake of bolstering the ranks of my household appliances, you all must help!"

"Because I have a bad premonition, I must refuse. Besides, we can't possibly win in a sports event with our roster of team members."

Godou, Erica, Yuri, Arianna and Lucretia. Five of them.

There was absolutely no sense of balance. How could such a team possibly function normally? Godou was certain of that.

"You've been spoiling your lover, but now you ignore me, your local wife[33]!?"

"W-Who is my local wife?"

"I, Lucretia Zola, am the local wife of you, Kusanagi Godou. How could you possibly not know that?"

The Witch of Sardinia declared nonchalantly.

Watching the frowning Godou, Yuri showed a terrible expression that seemed to say 'It really was like that!? To think I believed in you so much!' Really, please spare me and don't play these kinds of jokes.

"I have completely no idea. You cannot just decide on your own ."

"No, I also want to experience it, how it feels to be Erica-san, who became the lover of the recently born Campione and won the title of [Diavolo Rosso]. And coincidentally, my dear friend you came along, so I have to make you spoil me."

"Please don't have such thoughts. How old are you, what good is there in relying on others?"

"Despite how I look, I am actually a very stubborn woman, oh? If you doubt my words, you can ask your grandfather."

"Don't describe those things in such vivid detail!"

Losing to Lucretia in spirit, Godou had no choice but to participate in the competition.

If it was a normal football match, five people were definitely not enough. But since there was a lack of participants, it suddenly became a beach football tournament that five people could play.

With such unfettered rules of typical Italian style, the competition began—

Godou's worries became reality.

Yuri and Arianna were incompetent at sports, while Lucretia was sports capable but too lazy.

Those three could not be counted on at all, so it was up to the remaining two.

As the trump card, Erica charged before the opponents' goal and scored alone. On the other hand, Godou ran everywhere, taking possession of the ball, passing, and was a total manual laborer.

With this sort of team, how could victory be sustained, and they were defeated in the third match.

After the tournament ended, Godou walked alone towards the beach.

Finding something that was either a coconut or a cycas tree, he leaned against the tree trunk to alleviate the fatigue from the beach football. Looking out towards the sky, the direct sunlight made his eyes narrow to a slit.

Thinking back, the current situation was much different from the first time he came to the Mediterranean.

Having obtained the supernatural body of a Campione, but more importantly—

"You're here at such a place, Godou? I was looking for you."

Chatting with him as she sat down beside him was Erica.

The first time he sat on a bench with this girl, they kept such a far distance from each other, but now—what distance, they were completely stuck together.

Oh no, too careless—! Godou realized his mistake.

Having claimed such an advantageous position, Erica pursued victory with monstrous strength and it was already impossible to escape from her.

Furthermore, an originally very attractive young beauty, was now dressed in this manner...

"E-Erica... Your current posture is not really appropriate, it's definitely not right, let's keep a little distance."

"Why? It wasn't easy to find time alone together, of course I have to make the most of every opportunity... And don't we lean close together like this all the time anyway?"

They weren't just leaning close to each other. With her calm voice, Erica was forcefully pressing against Godou.

Her two legs entangling Godou, sitting on his thighs, her bountiful bosom pressing upon him, her arm wrapped around his neck, their faces slowly nearing each other, and finally a light kiss beside his ear.

"True, if you put it that way, but with your current attire..."

"Yes, how do you feel about it? How's my swimsuit? Really, Godou, you keep diverting your gaze away from my body, do you dislike this one... That's not possible? Or should I say, the opposite ?"

It was just as Erica described.

Kusanagi Godou did not make any comments about the tastes of this young beauty in her choice of glamorous clothing, because too much of her body was exposed, and Godou could not admire normally with a straight gaze.

"Please don't do this! I beg you!"

Lamenting his lack of vocabulary, Godou could only plead clumsily.

Of course it had no effect, and he was pushed down by her.

Her bright red and moist lips had gently surrounded Godou's, from a bystander's perspective, this was clearly a daring pair of lovers making out.

"...The two of us, isn't it time to resume what happened the night in Sicily? Right, Godou, at that time, I already offered my purity to you—"

Sucking on Godou's lips for a full minute, Erica spoke lightly with a lubricated voice.

"Nothing of that sort. I already said it. Sleeping on the same bed has nothing to do with purity..."

"Ah, but that's not all there was to that night? Hoho, Godou and I were wearing much less than right now, or rather, wearing nothing at all would not be an exaggeration?"

"Uh... Yes... You are right."

Recalling the memories of that time, Godou still could not bear it.

"However, this is the main point! Aren't we in the middle of a group trip?"

"Just change it to a private one, Godou and me, just the two of us."

Godou lost strength in that moment, as thoughts surfaced of giving up and doing as he was told.

But he suddenly thought, no way! I can't do this.

If he didn't put up any resistance, she would simply go further and further each time! He must rally his fighting spirit, and continue his battle of resistance!

"Godou-san, and Erica-san! You two are really unbelievable! At this early hour, and out in open public, what on earth are you two doing!?"

Awe-inspiring with a hint of embarrassment, the words of reproach suddenly interrupted them.

Due to embarrassment, Yuri had yelled out with her face all red. It seemed like she noticed the two were gone, and had come chasing after them.

"What's the matter? At this beach, aren't all lovers like this?"

"N-No good at all, you two are too shameless!"

"Hmm... How about we take turns then. For every week, I will take four days as the proper wife, Yuri the lover can have two. And then leave the remaining day for the local wife Lucretia, not bad, right?"

"What crazy words are you saying!?"

"A schedule. The times and number of days for honeymoon moments with Godou. I am not a woman who ignores the situation in order to monopolize the Campione who is [King]. Of

course, to be honest, I'd like it to be just the two of us forever, but I can't put him on too tight a leash."

"You, what do you take me for!"

Godou's emotional outburst was dismissed by the witch who saw through everything.

Godou and Yuri looked at each other meaningfully, and Erica sneered:

"Yes, I took into account Godou's fetishes and personality when I made that suggestion. Godou always speaks with righteousness, but those are mere words. In actual practice, every time he will go out of hand. See, I lost sight of him for just a little while and he goes over the line with Yuri."

"Uh, ummm... There were compelling reasons... No other way."

"Uh, because there were reasons it had to be done that time... No choice at all."

"Hmph, how come in an instant, you two spoke with such unity , perhaps you've been secretly colluding?"

Faced with the two who spoke as one, Erica frowned with displeasure. And then—

"It hurts! Ouuuuuuuuuuuuuuch, please don't twist my ear with your monstrous strength!"

"E-Erica-san, please stop. If this continues, Godou-san's ear will come off!"

Not long after they finished their lovers' quarrels.

Yuri suddenly asked.

"By the way, from Godou-san's story, the god Melqart also woke up, right? What happened to the divine king?"

She asked about that incident.

Godou had not covered this event because his story stopped at that point.

"Ah, you told her the story of Verethragna, but you didn't tell her the ending? This is a wonderful memory of how Godou and I were united in both our hearts and our bodies. OK, let me tell you the rest of the story. Actually, after that, we were at Sicily—"

"W-Wait, Erica, could you please not express things in such an easily misunderstood manner?"

"...Godou-san. Could it be that something happened that you are ashamed to tell others, so you are hiding it from me?"

The Sardinian sky was an endless deep blue.

Now the true summer really began.

The quarrelsome story of the threesome, was only just about to begin.

Flowing along the sounds of the tide, came a familiar voice.

"...Oh?"

She nodded lightly.

Trying to focus her ears to listen. As the ruler of darkness and the earth, she also had a deep history with the sea. Borrowing the unpredictable powers of the wind and the waves, perhaps she could listen clearly to what they were saying.

It was a success.

"...What, 'tis that fellow. Crossing the oceans to come here, for what reason?"

Several months ago, the Campione who defeated her.

A young novice who recently usurped the authority of the victorious warlord. Though unrefined, the youth's fortitude proved to be immeasurable. His voice was currently very soft, but could still be heard clearly.

Looking out into the distance at the sea before her, she bore a smile.

Sharp rocks and reefs which seemed to cut open skin with a single touch. Every time the waves made contact, they turned white and scattered. The sea breeze was howling, and the clouds inhabiting the sky were rapidly moving.

On the other side of the sea—probably near the shore, that youth was there.

"Hmph, to think that the time for one to meet that fellow again would be so soon."

She smiled lightly, adding a spot of radiance to the corner of her lips.

The heretic mother earth goddess, ruling the sky, earth and underworld, the descendant of the oldest and strongest goddess.

Possessing silver hair and black eyes, appearing in the form of a tender young girl—Heretic Athena, declared to the sea:

"Kusanagi Godou, thou shalt wait for the time to come, though it is yet unknown whether one will fight thee or get along in peace. However, the place one shall encounter thee again, will surely give rise to new chaos—lookest forward to it with patience!"

Predicting the omens of a commotion from the sky, the earth and the sea, Athena felt exceptionally roused.

The war god not seen for months, had lit a fire within her heart, and she laughed violently.

Afterword

Greetings, we meet again, or welcome to first time readers, I am Takedzuki Jou.

Finally a prequel publication worthy of commemoration for this work.

Therefore, if this is your first foray into the series, and you picked the third volume, or perhaps you were enticed by the tsundere blonde girl drawn by Sirkovsky-sensei, even if you are starting in the middle of this series... do not hesitate, head over directly to the cashier and buy it. It's not too late to read Volumes 1 and 2 after finishing Volume 3.

Of course, buying them all at once is also fine, in fact personally, I would recommend readers buy books in that fashion.

And then there are the readers who have finished all the publications, you're the best.

The third volume was something I predicted as an author a long time ago.

A very long while back, I was thinking, 'in this story's setting, there is definitely a story much different from the first volume!' (wry laugh)

The pattern established Volumes 1 and 2 was 'the protagonist with the serious personality engaging in all sorts of destructive activities at various famous sights and monuments', but this did

not happen... Though many places were still destroyed, and our heroine Erica's behavior isn't quite the same as before.

It would be great if readers can enjoy and savor Volume 3 rich with side story feeling.

Next, for this work which has somehow grown into a series, I recently keep receiving questions about the setting and timeframe.

One of the most common questions follows.

Question: Amongst the seven Campiones, are there any ladies?

This question was received by Supervisor-san at the editorial department of Super Dash Bunko.

I also know, in this intensely competitive light novel industry, the concern for using delicately charming female characters in illustrations to attract readers. This is very important for future business strategy.

Personally, I hope that Asaura-sensei's "Muscle Cop" can be serialized every month on the web, and that Ranjou-sensei will give Otoya more appearances. I often think that these kinds of manly male festivals are OK, but actually I am very clear on separating my private interests from my public work. So I answered in the following manner.

Answer: A good many of them. For example, John Pluto Smith who lives in America.

"...That is clearly a man's name."

"This is the alias for her Campione identity. Unbeknownst to others, she fights evil sorcerers as a solitary masked hero. Virtually no one knows her real identity."

"Then why the name John Smith?"

"The first authority she usurped from a god was [Metamorphosis]. Though it has transformations such as a combat state or a wild beast state, the primitive state is a muscle-bound masked male in a skintight outfit! The mysterious muscular gentleman appearing out of the dark night, somehow became known as a hero. And so the name was chosen!"

"Let's use something simpler, a cross-dressing beauty!"

And so, from 'male form' --> 'cross-dressing beauty', the setting was altered. Actually, the settings of the seven Campiones are still gradually under consideration.. However... due to various reasons (mainly because I keep forgetting the settings I came up with earlier), the content keeps changing.

Ah, a protagonist who is an American woman living in Los Angeles. (Occupation: Devil King of Justice, Age: 30 years or so, due to being too busy, she has no boyfriend let alone getting married, thus accumulating much stress. Has a habit of wearing cosplay out into the streets every night. *Note from Editor: this setting is still at an unconfirmed stage. Readers please don't be angry if the setting changes completely when the story is published.) Treat it as a side story of this series. If readers would like to read this side story, please pour your passion into postcards

and send them directly to the editorial department of Super Dash Bunko.

Perhaps a refreshing light novel protagonist, which office ladies can identify themselves with, will be born in this manner! ... Though I kind of doubt it.

Finally, in Volume 4, two silver-haired characters are set to appear. Finally the summer vacation, things will develop in the usual fashion. If possible, everyone please continue to look forward to it.

Takedzuki Jou, February 2009

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **called game**: In baseball, a called game is one in which, for any reason, the umpire in chief terminates play. In other words, end game.
2. ↑ **hime**: princess.
3. ↑ **rakshasa**: a race of mythological humanoid beings or unrighteous spirits in Hinduism and Buddhism, also called man-eaters.
4. ↑ **Yamato Takeru**: a Japanese legendary prince of the Yamato dynasty. One of his exploits resulted in the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi gaining its alternative moniker, the Kusanagi no Tsurugi ("grass-cutting word").[1]
5. ↑ **Shikoku**: the smallest of the four main islands of Japan.[2]
6. ↑ **Prajñā**: one of the three divisions of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism, meaning wisdom.[3]
7. ↑ **Taishou era**: July 30, 1912 to December 25, 1926, the reign of the Taishou Emperor.
8. ↑ **Ni-choume**: a district in the Tokyo ward of Shinjuku.
9. ↑ **Witenagemot**: ("meeting of wise men" in Old English) a political institution in Anglo-Saxon England.[4]
10. ↑ **Golgotha**: the name of the site believed to be where Jesus Christ was crucified.[5]
11. ↑ **Hannibal**: the legendary Carthaginian general renowned as one of the greatest generals in history.[6]
12. ↑ **Scipio**: Roman general best known for defeating Hannibal.[7]
13. ↑ **Fantastico! Fantastico! Figlio Del Sole!**: Italian for "Fantastic! Fantastic! Son of the sun!"

14. ↑ **Torre dell'Elefante**: Tower of the Elephant, a medieval tower built in 1307.
15. ↑ **Torre di San Pancrazio**: another medieval tower in Cagliari.
16. ↑ **Four Elements**: (earth, air, water and fire) the classical elements proposed by Greek philosophers. Aristotle later added a fifth element: aether.
17. ↑ **Five Elements**: (metal, wood, water, fire and earth) the five elemental substances used as a conceptual device in many fields of early Chinese thought such as Feng Shui, astrology, Chinese medicine, music, military strategy and martial arts.
18. ↑ **trattoria**: an Italian-style eating establishment, less formal than a ristorante, but more formal than an osteria.
19. ↑ **seppuku**: literally "stomach-cutting", a form of suicide performed through disembowelment, practiced by Japanese samurai as part of bushido to preserve honor.
20. ↑ **Word of Abandonment**: quoted by Jesus from Psalm 22, it is the only saying that appears in more than one gospel (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34).
21. ↑ Psalm 22:2-3
22. ↑ Psalm 22:14-16
23. ↑ Psalm 22:19-21
24. ↑ Psalm 22:22
25. ↑ **inning**: an inning in baseball consists of six outs, three for each team. A regulation game consists of nine innings.
26. ↑ **Maitreya**: a bodhisattva prophesied to appear on Earth, achieve complete enlightenment, and teach the pure dharma, according to Buddhist tradition.[8]

27. ↑ **Kothar-wa-Khasis**: a Canaanite craftsman god who aided Baal in his battles. Considered the equivalent of the Greek god Hephaestus.[9]
28. ↑ **Vajradhara**: (執) the ultimate primordial Buddha, his name means the bearer of the thunderbolt.[10]
29. ↑ **Amirani**: a culture hero of a Georgian epic who resembles the Classical Prometheus.[11]
30. ↑ **Yam**: a god of the sea popular in ancient Egyptian times.[12]
31. ↑ **shogi**: (将) literally "general's chess," a Japanese two-player strategy board game.[13]
32. ↑ **yakshini**: to be precise, Yuri's eyes were like those of a yakshini, a broad class of female nature spirits from Hindu mythology.[14]
33. ↑ **local wife**: a local mistress for having an affair in a foreign or distant land.